

Article

Zhuangzi's Theory on "Fate" and the Humanistic Spirit within

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Abstract: Conventional accounts of Zhuangzi's concept of fate are limited to only a certain aspect of it. At the same time, they seem to be mutually contradictory. This essay investigates this concept afresh based on textual analysis and elucidates Zhuangzi's real concerns about fate. This analysis reveals that Zhuangzi laid stress on the virtue demonstrated in confronting the unavoidable. More specifically, the important meaning of fate encompasses, on the one hand, a whole acceptance of the facts facing us by forgetting oneself, and on the other hand, responding positively to the facts by following the "Heavenly Way" until a spontaneous state is reached. We shall see as well how Zhuangzi's views on the relation between Heaven and the Human, and on certain moral values, help to validate his theory on fate. Thus, through exploring his underlying thoughts and showing how their various aspects are logically connected, we shall show that Zhuangzi's concept of fate is imbued with a humanistic spirit in the face of affairs in the real world.

Keywords: fate; virtue; fact; heaven; spontaneity

1. Introduction

The presented attitude towards fate¹ in Zhuangzi's philosophy is of profound value to explore. There are mainly four types of interpretations of Zhuangzi's understanding of fate. Firstly, some scholars classify Zhuangzi as a conformist and fatalist in terms of contentment with what has happened in one's life.² The second view demonstrates some positive dimensions in Zhuangzi's thought, arguing that he contended not only to embrace whatever one's destiny is, but also to take advantage of it and turn it into conditions of possibility for a state of life anew. The third view is that Zhuangzi regarded what is beyond our control as the best that can happen and any attempt to take control over it leads to chaos and artificiality. Hence, he recommended living by non-constricted action. There is, moreover, a fourth position which seems quite particular. Zhuangzi seems to speak of controlling fate through self-reflection and by improving our own behavior which is the only thing that we can determine.³ Each of these views displays a certain aspect of Zhuangzi's propositions on fate but seem contradictory to some extent. In this essay, I aim to re-examine the concept of fate and further elucidate it coherently based on the original

¹ Lisa Raphals delineates a comprehensive picture of the Greek and Chinese semantic field of meanings contained in the word "fate". She systematically organizes and classifies the usages and nuances of *ming* in the different discourses of the Mohist, Daoist and Confucian. She points out that, "In the late Zhou and Warring States we find both a broader semantic field for words concerned with fate, fatalism, and destiny and an increasingly complex range of concepts associated (and debated) with the word 'ming'". From the most important Zhou and Warring States uses of *ming* laid out, we can also grasp the different usages of *ming* in the *Zhuangzi*. These mainly include *An ming*安命 (resting in conformity with *ming*); *Cheng ming*成命 (completing *ming*); *Da ming*命 (grasping hold of *ming*); *Fu ming*命 (returning to *ming*); *Sui ming*遂命 (following destiny); *Shou ming*受命 (receiving the decree); *Shi ming*命 (the fate of the times); *Zhi ming*致命 (carry out a command); *You ming*有命 (the question of the existence of fate). (Lupke 2005, pp. 76–83). Generally, the translation of "ming" in the *Zhuangzi* is fate, the concept of which is also expressed through other terms such as *fen*分 (allotments).

² For instance, Xiaogan Liu(笑敢) contends that Zhuangzi, as a fatalist, exaggerated the inevitability of an exterior power that is out of the control of human beings. He hereby pledges the legitimacy of being content with fate (Liu 2010, pp. 142–47).

³ Mercedes Valmisa makes a comprehensive review on the subject of "fate". She summarizes Zhuangzi's ideas on "fate" into three kinds, as mentioned from the second view to the fourth above (Valmisa 2015, pp. 1–22).

texts of the *Zhuangzi*⁴, starting with looking into Zhuangzi's real concern with "fate" in the inner chapters. I shall offer an interpretation and figure out a legitimate way to integrate the four viewpoints which seem different from each other but are all reasonable at some level.⁵

2. Zhuangzi's Real Concern on "Fate"

I will start with an interesting seeming ambiguity inherent in Zhuangzi's argumentation on fate: it seems that Zhuangzi made a clear claim on some kinds of things which are supposed to be "fate" and, yet, elsewhere he refused to label "things that cannot be avoided" as "fate". Here are three paragraphs:

"Life, death, preservation, loss, failure, success, poverty, riches, worthiness, unworthiness, slander, fame, hunger, thirst, cold, heat—these are the alternations of the world, the workings of fate". (Watson 2013, p. 39)

"To serve your parents and be content to follow them anywhere—this is the perfection of filial piety. To serve your ruler and be content to do anything for him—this is the peak of loyalty. Additionally, to serve your own mind so that sadness or joy does not sway or move it; To understand what you can do nothing about and to be content with it as with fate—this is the perfection of virtue". (Watson 2013, p. 27)

"To know what you can't do anything about and to be content with it as you would with fate—only a man of virtue can do that". (Watson 2013, p. 36)

It is obvious in paragraph 1 that Zhuangzi explicitly and directly defined various kinds of things (such as our experiences and natural phenomena, etc.) as the workings of "fate". This may lead to an assumption that, for Zhuangzi, there is a clear line that demarcates which kinds of things are "workings of fate". However, differently from the traditional understanding, in paragraphs 2 and 3, Zhuangzi made a subtle distinction between "what you can do nothing about" (or "what you can't do anything about") and "fate" per se because he stated that we should treat the former contentedly *as with* fate. Here, his opinion on fate is rather obscure since things that we can do nothing about are not apparently counted as fate. So, what kind of concern does this reflect from such a seeming ambiguity?

It can be inferred from the second and third passages that Zhuangzi actually treated the so-called "things we can do nothing about" as an opportunity to serve our mind, resulting

⁴ In this essay, I shall roughly follow the basic consensus in the academia, regarding the Inner Chapters as written by Zhuangzi, and the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters as works of his disciples in subsequent times. Gao Heng (高亨) lists six pieces of strong evidence to make this classification of the *Zhuangzi* a legitimate one—see (Gao 1977, pp. 1–3). However, I will also take into account Wang Shumin (王叔岷)'s finding that the Inner Chapters are more trustworthy while the other two Chapters are relatively more dubious; although this is not entirely so, given that there are instances where the three are inter-mixed. See (Wang 2007, pp. 17–20). I will, therefore, reference certain views in the Outer and Miscellaneous to support the central meaning of the Inner Chapters to enrich Zhuangzi's thoughts in a broad context.

⁵ Based on the thorough investigation of "fate" in the *Zhuangzi*, Mercedes Valmisa arrives at the conclusion that "a heterogeneous compilation, the *Zhuangzi* thus contains materials holding different and even opposing intellectual and philosophical positions" and then comments, "unfortunately, the fact that both the ancient texts and the organized, religious tradition of Daoism are multifaceted and encompass a number of different views and perspectives, outlooks and positions, tends to bypass scholars in their desire—like the Dialecticians in the *Zhuangzi*—to create integrated systems, establish limiting classifications, and generally make traditional views conform to their expectations." (Valmisa 2015, p. 18) The point that the *Zhuangzi* contains very different ideas on a same problem holds true, and scholars' endeavors to create unified systems and making limiting classifications due to their own expectations is subjective to some degree. However, Zhuangzi, as a Daoist philosopher, has his own distinctively well-structured thoughts. The outer and miscellaneous chapters, the authorship of which is generally ascribed to his disciples, despite holding disparate views on fate, can reflect Zhuangzi's complete thought on "fate" from a certain regard. Therefore, it is of importance to confirm Zhuangzi's own complete comprehension in the first place, I believe it is comprehensible to grasp the various viewpoints shown elsewhere other than the inner chapters. The methodology adopted in this essay is thus quite different from Mercedes Valmisa's, given that I tend to respect Zhuangzi's own thought as a systematic philosophy in the inner chapters while figuring out possible interpretations towards other seemingly inconsistent or contradictory thoughts in the *Zhuangzi* as a whole.

in the cultivation of innate virtue⁶. This point is well demonstrated in his following remarks, “Just go along with things and let your mind move freely. Resign yourself to what cannot be avoided and nourish what is within you—this is best.” (Watson 2013, p. 28) Here, “things” in front of us and “what cannot be avoided” are literally what Zhuangzi mentioned as “things we can do nothing about”. His ultimate concern lies in the “mind” moving freely to go along with things and thus enable “virtue” (“what is within us”) to be nourished. For Zhuangzi, “what we can do nothing about” is not entirely equivalent to “fate”. Even though presented with the fact of a situation which we cannot control, nevertheless, we can still face it with a sense of peace as though it has been predetermined. Significantly, Zhuangzi defined “the perfection of virtue” by adopting moral values to inspire our new understanding on virtue: the perfection of filial piety is demonstrated in serving our parents and following them anywhere contentedly; the peak of loyalty is displayed in serving our ruler and doing anything for him contentedly. Therefore, the perfection of virtue lies in serving our mind and maintaining its peace from being perturbed by things that we can do nothing about. Here, the meaning of “perfection” is shown in the supreme form of “acceptance”, namely, treating them as if with fate. That is to say, Zhuangzi used the term “fate” in such a way that indicates the supreme state of acceptance: viewing things unavoidable with blissful equanimity as if they have been fated. This is not easily achieved, since ordinary people tend to be disturbed by their emotions provoked by outer things. By comparison, the one who is able to be content with what he/she can do nothing about, as with fate, is considered as a Sage⁷. This spiritual state can only be attained by serving one’s mind to the extent that sadness or joy does not sway or move it. This is also defined by Zhuangzi as having “perfect virtue”. In this sense, the concept of fate never stands for objective restrictions that are imposed on human beings, rather, it signifies implications of one’s virtue, namely, being able to see the unavoidable as if predestined and then settle into it. Thus, we say that “fate” manifests itself only when one’s virtue is cultivated to a high level.

On the basis of the above analysis, we can better understand another conversation that seems rather confusing:

“When Gongwen Xuan saw the Commander of the Right, he was startled and said, ‘What kind of man is this? How did he come to lose his foot? Was it Heaven? Or was it man?’ ‘It was Heaven, not man,’ said the commander”. (Watson 2013, p. 20)

The Commander of the Right was someone who was punished by having one foot amputated, a common penalty in ancient China. He would have been supposed to have behaved badly and committed something immoral. Although Zhuangzi threw a question, seemingly trying to figure out the reason that caused such an outcome, it has nothing to do with his real concern. As we have seen in the commander’s reply, he ironically and conversely attributed the fact of “losing his foot” to “Heaven”, although the inducing factor is mostly likely ascribed to his own misbehavior. Therefore, the purpose of Zhuangzi’s correlation of “fact” to “fate” is fully displayed once again; that is, whatever the “fact” of

⁶ David Schaberg examines the etymology, early pronunciation, usage and meaning of *ming*. He discovers that *ming*, in the context of the king’s utterance in reconstructions of the investiture ceremony, was itself a gift. This helps to account for the close association between *ming* and *de* (德). He mentions David Nivison’s research that frames *de* as the “moral force” that the recipient of a gift or favor feels as “psychic power” emanating from the giver. In his interaction with spirits and noble families, the king cultivates his moral force through regular sacrifices and other displays of beneficence. (Lupke 2005, p. 28) Schaberg has pinpointed the close relation between *ming* and virtue, a relation which is basically interpreted in the moral dimension. In this essay, however, I shall present the correlation between fate (*ming*) and virtue in a new dimension from the point view of Zhuangzi, the facet of which is rarely explored in depth by previous scholars.

⁷ The Sage in Zhuangzi’s view is someone who takes “rambling” as the way of living. Zhuangzi said, “To hold fast to Virtue is called enrootment. To mature in Virtue is called establishment. To follow the Way is called completion. To see that external things do not blunt the will is called perfection. When the gentleman clearly comprehends these ten things, then how huge will be the greatness of his mind setting forth, how endless his ramblings with the ten thousand things!” (Watson 2013, p. 85) Instead of clinging to any fixated positions, perspectives and preferences, the sage has an open mind to adapt to any contingencies and unexpected circumstances. As Moeller and D’Ambrosio point out, although “aimless motion of you [rambling] has no provenance and no destination”, it still “implies an acute sense of fit” (Moeller and D’Ambrosio 2017, p. 167). The sense of fit, as a defining feature of the virtuous sage, shows an accepting attitude toward things that unavoidably occur in life.

the cause, Zhuangzi treated it just as with “fate”, revealing the intrinsic requirement of “being content with it”, which represents the value deeply rooted in his viewpoint on the unavoidable fact in life. Here, Zhuangzi seems to appreciate someone who has lost his foot due to having committed something “immoral” from the Confucian viewpoint. He looked on him instead as bearing virtue, given especially that he had a calm attitude toward his bad situation. This shows that Zhuangzi actually defined virtue from a perspective which was very different from that of the Confucians, through his own unique understanding of morality.

Now the seeming ambiguity put forward from the start can be well clarified. The so-called “life, death, preservation, loss, etc.” in the quoted paragraph could be reckoned as “the workings of fate”, only if such facts can be completely embraced by a cultivated content mind. Elsewhere, Zhuangzi made a straightforward assertion that “Life and death are fated—constant as the succession of dark and dawn, a matter of Heaven.” (Watson 2013, p. 44) The reason why he defined “life and death” as being “fated” lies in the fact that Zhuangzi, as a man of virtue, was already aware that “life and death” is so normal and natural (similar to “the succession of dark and dawn” generated by Heaven) that they should be accepted peacefully.

It also illustrates that the concept of “fate” for Zhuangzi is orientated in a world of meaning instead of being representative of extrinsic constraints in an objective world, alluding to a favorable attitude of contentedness towards things that cannot be avoided. More precisely, Zhuangzi believed that it makes no sense to try to explore and clarify “fate” itself. We can see this point in his argument that “Heaven has its cycles and numbers, earth its flats and slopes—yet why should I seek to comprehend them?” (Watson 2013, p. 237) In this context, he brought up the following question, “No one knows when they will end—how then can we say that they are fated to die? No one knows when they began—how then can we say that they are not fated to die?” (Watson 2013, p. 237) This interestingly shows that death was not arbitrarily pushed into the scope of “fate”. In such a respect, we can confirm that in terms of “death” being classified as “fate”, Zhuangzi actually intended to stress the importance of consummating virtue and the ensuing positive embrace of the “fact”. At this point, I have to clarify that the virtuous man in the Zhuangzian sense always holds “Heaven” in awe and entrusts himself to “Heaven” with great reverence rather than regarding it as something purely natural.⁸ It is only on the basis of such an emotional identification, with trust and veneration on Heaven, that we can understand Zhuangzi’s saying “The Great Clod burdens me with form, labors me with life, eases me in old age, and rests me in death. So if I think well of my life, for the same reason I must think well of my death” (Watson 2013, p. 44). This makes sense to us since, from the statement “I think well of my life,” we cannot logically conclude that “I must think well of my death.”. Assuming that Zhuangzi was advocating passively obeying orders from Heaven rather than embracing it in awe, we might hold an impersonal attitude towards everything. However, it would be difficult to figure out why the Zhuangzian sage is able to “harmonize and delight in them, master them and never be at a loss for joy” and to “do this day and night without break and make it be spring with everything, mingling with all and creating the moment within your own mind” which is “what I call being whole in

⁸ Actually, it is a constant belief that is generally shared by most of the ancient Chinese philosophers. However, many scholars maintain that the concept of “Heaven” for Zhuangzi should be understood from the perspective of “objective naturalness”, comprising the dimensions of “objective Nature” (Feng 2009, p. 252), “circulations of natural energy (Qi)” (Li 1978, p. 144) and “objective natural principle” (Yang 2007, p. 37). However, for Zhuangzi, despite the original meaning “nature” and “natural occurrences”, Heaven also serves as the very source of value in the human world. He emphasizes the “Spirit of Heaven and Earth” in particular as a beacon of meaning for human behavior. I will elaborate on this point in Section 4.1.

power”⁹ (Watson 2013, p. 39). In a word, accepting whatever destiny throws at him with blissful equanimity, especially contemplating death in such a serene and fearless manner, would probably not be possible without humble commitment to Heaven as well as being conscious of human limitations. In this sense, the Zhuangzian sage regards all things unavoidable caused by the natural workings of Heaven with great reverence, bearing no feelings of being coerced into a certain situation. At the same time, he has a clear insight that the workings of heaven will never stop at any moment so that something different is incessantly being created and new possibilities are always worth anticipating.¹⁰ This sheds some light on the positive humanistic spirit of Zhuangzi’s opinion on “fate”.

3. A Step Further—Humanistic Spirit Revealed in a More Positive Way

Actually, the humanistic spirit within the concept of fate is not just revealed statically in someone who bears virtue. Instead, it must be dynamically realized in interaction with the real world. Zhuangzi took a step further to call for “acting in accordance with the state of affairs and forgetting about yourself” in a reality inundated with “things” to be tackled. Such a positive view is specifically demonstrated in a story in the chapter of “In the World of Men”. A duke named Zigao was sent on a very important mission to a foreign country. The task was so difficult to fulfill that he was in a dilemma. He lamented, “If you do not succeed, you are bound to suffer from the judgment of men. If you do succeed, you are bound to suffer from the yin and yang I will have both worries” (Watson 2013, p. 26). The so-called “yin and yang” described his psychological internal suffering even before he carried out the mission. He consulted Confucius, here Zhuangzi’s representative, whose teaching was as follows:

“In the world, there are two great decrees: one is fate and the other is duty. That a son should love his parents is fate—you cannot erase this from his heart. That a subject should serve his ruler is duty—there is no place he can go and be without his ruler, no place he can escape to between heaven and earth. These are called the great decrees. Therefore, to serve your parents and be content to follow them anywhere—this is the perfection of filial piety. To serve your ruler and be content to do anything for him—this is the peak of loyalty. Additionally, to serve your own mind so that sadness or joy does not sway or move it; to understand what you can do nothing about and to be content with it as with fate—this is the perfection of virtue. As a subject and a son, you are bound to find things you cannot avoid. If you act in accordance with the state of affairs and forget about yourself, then what leisure will you have to love life and hate death? Act in this way, and you will be all right” (Watson 2013, p. 27).

It is well known that Confucianism makes a very clear distinction between “fate” and “duty”. The “fate” is in the scope of “Heaven” beyond control of human beings whereas things that could be determinable and should be held accountable is what “duty” indicates. As the Confucianist holds, there is no freedom for human beings within the range of “fate” and yet they still have ability to build up a life with dignity through moral practice to

⁹ That is, perfection of virtue or consummate virtuosity in Zhuangzi’s view. Apparently, Zhuangzi held a special view on the concept of “virtue”. Being distinguishable from Confucian virtue, Zhuangzi’s “virtue” no longer signifies the moral value encapsulated in “humaneness” (仁), “righteousness” (义) and “ritual propriety” (礼) but has profound significance and rich connotations. Kim-chong Chong holds that, in the Outer Chapters, “virtue” is postulated as the pristine, innocent and unspoiled state of self, while in the Inner Chapters, it embodies a sense of the “oneness” of all things amidst their transformations. He describes six characters individually that are either physically deformed or ugly yet considered as possessing virtue, then comments on the overall significance of Zhuangzi’s sense of virtue, “Despite their deformities—in other words, being outside the form of the rites—they have a calm and harmonious attitude toward life and may even have charismatic power They regard the transformation of things as *ming* and in terms of a single source. In other words, they have the perspective of *tian* that does not dwell on distinctions between things. Whatever happens is a matter of transformation within this source of oneness. Instead of lamenting life’s contingencies, they are able to ‘make it be spring with everything’ (物春)” (Chong 2016, pp. 125–28).

¹⁰ Mercedes Valmisa elucidates Zhuangzi’s notion of adaption with regard to fate as follows: “one needs to adapt purposively to changes, moving along with them and making best use of new opportunities” (Valmisa 2015, p. 7). This crucial standpoint on fate basically stems from Zhuangzi’s epistemological view on the “world”, namely, it constantly undergoes the process of transformation (化). The fact that all circumstances are a priori axiologically equal is justified not only in that Zhuangzi never presupposes anything good or bad from the perspective of value of individual things, but also because situations are permanently changing on a holistic basis, and could always open up new chances unexpectedly.

accomplish the call of “duty”.¹¹ However, Zhuangzi said, “In the world, there are two great decrees: one is fate and the other is duty. That a son should love his parents is fate—you cannot erase this from his heart. That a subject should serve his ruler is duty—there is no place he can go and be without his ruler, no place he can escape to between heaven and earth.” There are two conspicuous points here. Firstly, the behavior of filiality generally reckoned as “duty” by Confucianism was categorized into “fate” by Zhuangzi to emphasize the aspect of “unavoidability” of “duty”, which indicates that he actually discussed ethical obligations in an existential sense. The judgement that a son should love his parents is deemed as something that is unavoidable in one’s life; secondly, Zhuangzi proposed that we should assume “duty” and take steps to deal with the unavoidable since his advice ended with “act in accordance with the state of affairs and forget about yourself.” As such, the interwoven thoughts between what is unavoidable, and duty is somehow integrated into Zhuangzi’s understanding of “fate”: the man with perfection of virtue can do what he is supposed to do in accordance with the affairs or facts against the background of treating things that cannot be avoided.

Based on Zhuangzi’s comprehension on “fate” and “duty”, an in-depth grasp on Zhuangzi’s main viewpoint can be achieved. The text shows that the perfection of virtue specifically refers to the mind being well-served with its essential connotation of eliminating needless emotions, such as sadness or joy that would disturb the mind. This is what we have discussed in part two, concentrating on an attitude of being content with things that cannot be avoided. What is worth mentioning here is that Zhuangzi took a step further to reveal his more positive intention. That is, to act in accordance with “the state of affairs” on the basis of “forgetting oneself”, which also indicates the removal of excessive emotions, including love (life) and hate (death). “The state of affairs” generally defined as “fact” by us, becomes Zhuangzi’s only concentration with the purpose of facing up to the actual “things” *per se* whereas the personal “emotions” could be naturally ignored (“then what leisure will you have to love life and hate death?”).¹² Thus, the thing unavoidable is able to manifest itself just as it is instead of being something that is attached by the “established mind” and “emotions” of human beings. It serves as the premise for a further action of “acting in accordance with” the state of affairs.

That is to say, with regard to the “unavoidable”, as in the case of serving one’s ruler to accomplish a duty, Zhuangzi paid more attention on devotion to the “fact” to get things done. Instead of just being content with something or some state of affairs by means of “forgetting oneself”, Zhuangzi goes further to advocate positive action by faithfully undertaking one’s obligation based on recognition of the fact of the case. In the chapter of “The Great and Venerable Teacher”, based on the quotation that points out life and death are fated—as constant as the succession of dark and dawn, Zhuangzi made a further comparison with serving the ruler. He exclaimed, “If he is willing to regard the ruler as superior to himself and to die for him, then how much more should he be willing to do for the Truth!” (Watson 2013, p. 44). Undoubtedly, in this very context, the “truth” refers to the fact of life and death, as well as all things that cannot be avoided. However, the analogy with serving the ruler stands out. If the ruler is so superior that a subject should

¹¹ Ted Slingerland offered a good explanation of the usages of fate in early Confucian texts. He claims, “Ming(fate) refers to forces that lie in the outer realm—that is, the realm beyond the bounds of proper human endeavor, or the area of life in which ‘seeking contributions to one’s getting it.’ This external world is not the concern of the gentleman, whose efforts are to be concentrated on the self—the inner realm in which ‘seeking contributions to one’s getting it.’ This is the arena in which the struggle for self-cultivation must be carried out. Once one has achieved success there, the vicissitudes of the outside world—life and death, fame and disgrace, wealth and poverty—can be faced ‘without worry and without fear’” (Slingerland 1996, p. 568).

¹² Notably, “wuqing” (无情) is brought out by Zhuangzi in the chapter of The Secret of Caring for Life. Kim-chong Chong holds that, “wuqing (无情) refers to certain facts that human beings have added to their lives. These include the facts of moral, social and political structures and relations, and also the factual beliefs involved in certain emotions (such as grief). In other words, Zhuangzi is suggesting the possibility of disengaging oneself from these human-made structures and relations and certain (false) beliefs” (Chong 2010, p. 36). Further, he contends that “being without the qing of human beings” suggests that “it is possible to re-orientate ourselves with regard to some emotions such as grief in the context of death. We conventionally grieve in this context, but this emotion is based upon a false belief and mistaken judgement about death being a loss. From the perspective of heaven there is no loss and no reason to grieve” (Chong 2010, p. 37). He captures Zhuangzi’s emphasis on “fact” and proposes that some beliefs including some kinds of personal emotions should be denied and a true one based on Heaven should be embraced.

not hesitate to lay down his life if needed, the one who values serving his mind most ought to even more wholeheartedly embrace the given “fact”, taking it as an order from the more superior Heaven.¹³ Elsewhere, Zhuangzi articulated the similar ideal vividly again, as follows:

“A child, obeying his father and mother, goes wherever he is told, east or west, south or north. Additionally, the yin and yang—how much more are they to a man than father or mother! Now that they have brought me to the verge of death, if I should refuse to obey them, how perverse I would be! What fault is it of theirs?” (Watson 2013, p. 48).

In a certain respect, Yin and Yang represent Earth and Heaven¹⁴ that are compared to mother and father who give birth to and bring up human beings. The virtue of a man displays filial piety by obeying the order from the Heaven¹⁵ to die, just as a child obeys his parents by going wherever he is told, otherwise, he would be blamed for his disobedience in terms of perseverance against the order of his parents. In the same way, the man who perseveres against the order of Heaven cannot be counted as having “filial” virtue.

It is commonly accepted that Zhuangzi criticized corrupt applications of the Confucian virtues that have degenerated to alienated moral values. He also contended that the preaching of morality, though considered by the Confucians as an efficient vehicle to cultivate people, is likely to be counterproductive.¹⁶ However, it is notable here that Zhuangzi adopted a new angle to comprehend the moral values: he put the moral values in the existential context to inspire human beings with how to confront the irresistible order from Heaven by adopting a comparison with ruler or parents. Meanwhile, the virtue of fidelity and filial piety that he values is nothing more than embracing what is distributed by Heaven with a sense of sincere responsibility and gratitude, instead of reluctance under oppression.¹⁷

It is in this sense that we can understand why Zhuangzi said “If he is willing to regard the ruler as superior to himself and to die for him, then how much more should he be willing to do for the Truth!” Zhuangzi took the “fact” or “truth” as an order from the more superior Heaven that deserves even much more fidelity and obedience, demanding that “action” should be taken completely in accordance with the state of affairs without any hesitation. The intention of being faithful to the fact and then devoting to practice demonstrates a positive spirit of taking initiative to an extent which is even more than in meeting moral obligations.

Looking back and examining Zhuangzi’s real concern about “fate”, namely, serving the mind to cultivate virtue, a deeper dimension of meaning has been revealed. That is, fully devoting oneself to “doing things” without private passions. Instead of merely removing passions subjectively, the issue pertains to performing actions in the real world, since it is only by cultivating the mind on “things” or “facts” can virtue be really perfected. This hints at the very fact that Zhuangzi never paused in the stage of merely accepting

¹³ For Confucians, there is nothing more important in life than following the ultimate moral order from Heaven, which should be accepted fully as one’s fate. Interestingly, Zhuangzi was also in favor of compliance with the order from Heaven, which in contrast refers to the “fact” in the given circumstances.

¹⁴ In ancient China, besides the usage of “yin and Yang” as in “suffering from the yin and yang” (之患), which is closely related to the physical body, it is also a descriptive abbreviation for the term “Heaven and Earth” See (Xu 2001, p. 320) for reference.

¹⁵ Furthermore, “Heaven and Earth”, as the origin of myriad things, can be simplified as “Heaven” for philosophers in ancient China. A.C. Graham notes that Zhuangzi “likes to personify (Heaven) as ‘the maker of things’. This concept, and the related metaphor of man as metal moulded by a smith hardly attracts a Westerner’s attention, since they are familiar in our own Christian background. But there is no Creator in Chinese religion or philosophy (Heaven continually ‘generates’ things, after the analogy of a father rather than a craftsman, he does not create things out nothing), and Chuang-tzu himself is thinking of his maker as moulding and remoulding in an endless process of transformation” (Graham 1981, p. 18).

¹⁶ In the Chapter of “Fit for Emperors and Kings”, Zhuangzi implied the side-effect of the proposition of “Inner Sageliness and Outward Kingliness” brought up by the Confucians. The Confucian morality may potentially cause a bad effect which is similar to “Hundun (沌)’s death”. Additionally, from Zhuangzi’s metaphorical allusions, “The bird flies high in the sky where it can escape the danger of stringed arrows. The field mouse burrows deep down under the sacred hill where it won’t have to worry about men digging and smoking it out” (Watson 2013, pp. 55–56), we can deduce that the people, like these creatures, would probably contrive to escape from the impositions of principles and regulations by the rulers.

¹⁷ For Confucius, the commands of “Heaven” are moral imperatives that usually have a moral purpose and function. Zhuangzi, on the other hand, is alleged to have essentially construed the order of “Heaven” from the standpoint of transformation of natural process. However, as can be seen from the analysis in this essay, Zhuangzi’s understanding does not stand purely on a “natural” basis, since the sense of commitment, trust and fidelity to “Heaven” is highlighted.

the fact calmly. Instead, he urged us to take action devoutly in accordance with the fact. Zhuangzi's humanistic spirit emerges in terms of assuming responsibility for what should be done. Only when one is "thrown" into the state of affairs itself and faces up to the fact without superfluous personal emotions to the extent of forgetting oneself, can he/she exert full potential to perform well. In this way, the concept of "fate" not only embodies a content attitude towards things that cannot be avoided, but also implies an initiative momentum within, through immersing oneself in the unavoidable things with unwanted emotions set aside. At the same time, it shows the possibility of avoiding sufferings on an internal and external level¹⁸ in that someone without emotions disturbing the mind would be inclined to perform better.

However, the fact that someone without emotions disturbing the mind is susceptible to producing good results when getting things done will not suffice. In fact, the basic principle of action put forward by Zhuangzi (i.e., "act in accordance with the state of affair and forget about yourself") has a very profound meaning, which could find expression in reality when it comes to tackling affairs. This has been neglected by previous scholars. I will offer a detailed interpretation on its application in practice given that the concept of fate has more direct bearing on existential-practical problems, and on soteriological or therapeutic practices.

4. The "Way" to Deal with Affairs and Make the Fact Properly Treated in Practice

Firstly, it is consequential to notice that the idea of "forget about yourself" proposed in the fable on Duke Zigao points to an approach in parallel to both "fasting of the heart" (心) and "sit down and forget everything" (坐忘) which are generally considered as the most well-known cultivating methods in Zhuangzi's philosophy. However, most scholars have interpreted these so-called apophatic spiritual practices merely from the perspective of "dissolution of self": a progressive clearing away of the body's excessive desire and the mind's rigid preconceptions, along with being physiologically and psychologically disengaged from social commitment in an indifferent manner.¹⁹ Without doubt, dissociating from identification with the "self" plays a crucial role in the course of cultivation. However, an apophatic praxis would probably lead to some kind of mysticism, or even result in a reclusive and individualist philosophy of life. However, in fact, these practical approaches can be positively put into practice in a down-to-earth way, signifying the characteristic of Daoist "inner sageliness and outward kingliness". I will argue further how "forgetting about yourself" only functions as the mental basis on the path to dealing with affairs properly.

Based on the analysis in part three, the principle of "act in accordance with the state of affairs and forget about yourself" can be interpreted in two ways. First and foremost, to "accept" things that cannot be avoided with a content mind underlies his claim "forgetting about yourself". Secondly, to "act" in accordance with the state of affairs describes how to behave when dealing with affairs. The "accepting" and "acting" at a deeper level reflect the function of mind, namely, receiving and responding. I will elaborate on the two facets and, thus, figure out the more substantive meaning within Zhuangzi's argumentation on fate.

4.1. Receiving

Ordinarily, the "mind" tends to resist or have a strong taste for unavoidable things with passions such as love and hate surging up, which would disturb its peacefulness. The

¹⁸ Zhuangzi's saying "act in this way, you will be all right" in the fable on the duke Zigao means that external sufferings could be avoided if things can be done in a selfless heart-mind state. I will give detailed explanations on the remarks "to suffer no harm (from the yin and yang and from the judgment of men) whether or not you succeed—only the man who has virtue can do that" in Part 3(2).

¹⁹ Bo Wang (王博) suggests that "fasting of the heart" is the method of settling one's life in a world out of order by means of abandoning and evading (Wang 2004, p. 39); Youru Wang argues that Zhuangzi detects the problem of self-identity and the established heart-mind and, therefore, proposes the practice of no-self; that is, to lose one's discriminating and privileging mind. However, this does not mean that Zhuangzi advocates a nihilistic notion of self that denies the existence of the empirical self and negates the possibility of spiritual progress and freedom. Rather, Zhuangzi's deconstruction has a more direct bearing on existential-practical problems, and on soteriological or therapeutic practices (Wang 2000, pp. 354–56).

mind is inclined to be distracted by outer things, rather than entrusting itself to “Heaven” to get settled. Such a problem has to be addressed in the first place.

It was mentioned in part two that genuine faith in Heaven is possessed by a man of virtue when engaging with the world. However, it should be emphasized that a religious reading, which considers Heaven as an ultimate and permanent entity, should also be avoided. As a denotation of what is not done by the human will and what is beyond human power, Heaven literally represents the myriad things as a whole in Nature, as well as an identifiable power that makes things go as they do but with no agent to be found. Therefore, despite a commitment to Heaven, consciously aiming at union with the “ultimate” is inadvisable. Actually, it is the “spirit” of “Heaven” that we are suggested to entrust ourselves to. The reference here is to the “value” that unfolds through our experiencing and interacting with myriad things in the universe. As Zhuangzi’s own portrait goes, “He came and went alone with the pure spirit of Heaven and earth, yet he did not view the ten thousand things with arrogant eyes” (Watson 2013, p. 296). The Zhuangzian sage is someone who wanders with the “Spirit of Heaven and Earth”, which has a great impact on the view of fate. We can explore this through a story in the chapter of “The Great and Venerable Teacher.” This is described as follows:

Master Yu and Master Sang were friends. Master Sang was badly ill and Master Yu paid a visit with some food. Master Yu heard Master Sang’s groaning, as if he was singing or crying, but could not figure out why. He asked Master Sang why he was crying. Sang replied,

“I was pondering what it is that has brought me to this extremity, but I couldn’t find the answer. My father and mother surely wouldn’t wish this poverty on me. Heaven covers all without partiality; earth bears up all without partiality—heaven and earth surely wouldn’t single me out to make me poor. I try to discover who is doing it, but I can’t get the answer. Still, here I am—at the very extreme. It must be fate” (Watson 2013, p. 54).

Sang pondered about the source of his extreme poverty and suffering. Undoubtedly, his parents surely would not wish that poverty and suffering on him. Then, he contemplated a more fundamental source, namely, parents as Heaven and Earth.²⁰ What is worth noting here is his description “Heaven covers all without partiality; earth bears up all without partiality”. Heaven and Earth is apparently endowed with a “spirit” of being “without partiality”. The spirit is a kind of value that Zhuangzi has discovered from the Heaven and Earth,²¹ which serves as a foundation for interpreting the life of human beings. It is the spirit of impartiality of Heaven that made Sang believe that he would not be singled out and condemned to be poor and to suffer. Just for this reason, he ultimately ascribed his poverty and suffering to the accidental “fate” and could accept it without any complaints. Clearly, the trust in Heaven is not a blind commitment but full of penetrating insights into its “spirit” or “virtue”, which is the content of “Spirit of Heaven and Earth” (天地精神) that Zhuangzi was in favor of. He explored it in the natural world and then tried to guide the understanding of human beings on their own life and their behavior.²² In Master Sang’s case, the unavoidable fact of his unfortunate condition was calmly reckoned to be the workings of fate. He was resigned to it on the basis of the understanding of the “Spirit of Heaven and Earth.”

²⁰ There are many factors leading to a bad situation, but here, Zhuangzi didn’t try to figure out some concrete reason. That is probably because, whatever it is, it can still be traced back to a more fundamental one until the most fundamental reason can be found and never be traced back again. Thus, he contemplated that it must be Heaven and Earth—the source of human beings’ life—just as parents who take care of our growth in the world and could be held accountable for what has happened to us as the root cause.

²¹ It could also be called the virtue of “Heaven and Earth”, which is clarified by the Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters, aiming to show the highly cherished virtue and appropriate way of living for human beings. It is stated that “he who has a clear understanding of the Virtue of Heaven and earth may be called the Great Source, the Great Ancestor” (Watson 2013, p. 99); “The Virtue of emperors and kings takes Heaven and earth as its ancestor, the Way and its Virtue as its master, inaction as its constant rule” (Watson 2013, p. 100). “Heaven and Earth” is personified as having the virtue of remaining empty, which humans ought to hold in great respect and undertake by self-cultivation.

²² Please see (Zhang 2018, pp. 29–61) for reference. In the essay, Rongkun Zhang (榕坤) roughly teases out three meanings of “Heaven”, all of which demonstrate Zhuangzi’s ultimate concern which lies in figuring out the most appropriate existential way of human beings by experiencing the Spirit of Heaven and Earth.

As long as we can accept “things” coming from “Heaven” humbly and reverently, exterior things would lose the power to bother us through our passions. This is of huge importance for avoiding suffering from the yin and yang (之患) and cultivating the virtue. The heart-mind, firstly as an organ of receiving outer things, is thus able to function appropriately in a proper range. It is in this way that we can truly accept and settle into what we cannot do anything about and to be content with it as fate.

Additionally, it should be noted that never bothering about things does not mean indifference towards what we have to deal with, but indicates treating things appropriately; that is, behaving wholly in accordance with the state of affairs. Moreover, it is the way to avoid suffering from the judgment of men (人道之患). This is an issue that concerns the reaction of the mind towards things and will be elucidated in the next section.

4.2. Responding

The principle of mind responding to outer things consists in “acting in accordance with the state of affairs”, or say, tallying with the nature of outer things. By contrast, the main factor leading to failure in an action is “taking the mind as authority” (心). I will first offer a detailed explanation and then suggest the appropriate way that Zhuangzi proposed, which might help us to understand a more subtle dimension within “fate”.

It is worthwhile to re-examine the story in the chapter of “In the World of Men”, in which Duke Zigao was sent to carry out a mission. He had to transmit word to a feudal lord in a foreign country, which was not an easy task to accomplish.²³ However, Zhuangzi made a very intricate statement that “to suffer no harm (from the yin and yang and from the judgment of men) whether or not you succeed—only the man who has virtue can do that” (Watson 2013, p. 26). It is comprehensible that the man of virtue would suffer no harm from yin and yang whatever the situation is, but how is no suffering from the judgment of men made possible in the case in which he does not succeed in his mission?

Given that Zigao desired success and feared failure so much, it would be very likely for him to enhance his aspiration for a well-performed task. The strong will and passion would probably be added to the “orders” given by the lord in the course of carrying out his duty. This may trigger a dangerous situation—his words might be exaggerated beyond the “fact” and he would be directly held responsible for any possible failure—this is also a danger provoked by “taking his own heart-mind as authority”. Even though he had a strong aspiration for success, the proper way of acting for him is supposed to accord with the state of affairs. That is why Zhuangzi said “transmit the established facts; do not transmit words of exaggeration” and “Do not deviate from your orders; do not press for completion.” In this way, no blame would be inflicted on him even if he failed. He just presented the established “fact” of the lord’s intention and order without deviation, instead of following the established heart-mind of his own. The removal of any attachment to passions from an established heart-mind and the faithfulness to the “fact” per se constitute the essential character of a virtuous man, as Zhuangzi reiterated.

Here, some scholars hold a view that the mind that Zhuangzi affirmed is merely like a mirror, objectively reflecting things in accordance to what they are actually like.²⁴ However, although Zhuangzi did consider that “the Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror—going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing”, simultaneously, he figured out the magical effect that this brings: “therefore he can win out over things and not hurt himself” (Watson 2013, p. 59). Presumably, “reflecting” without storing (i.e., never taking

²³ The text says “To transmit words that are either pleasing to both parties or infuriating to both parties is one of the most difficult things in the world. When both parties are pleased, there must be some exaggeration of the good points; and when both parties are angered, there must be some exaggeration of the bad points. Anything that smacks of exaggeration is irresponsible. Where there is irresponsibility, no one will trust what is said, and when that happens, the man who is transmitting the words will be in danger” (Watson 2013, p. 27). “Words are like wind and waves; actions are a matter of gain and loss. Wind and waves are easily moved; questions of gain and loss easily lead to danger” (Watson 2013, p. 28).

²⁴ According to Junyi Tang (唐君毅), the mirror-like heart-mind functions as a widescreen and nothing is harbored within. It only passively receives things that are coming up. Significant parallels are revealed by other scholars, such as A.C. Graham and Alan D. Fox. Actually, Kang Chan (詹康) makes a succinct and insightful literature review and then indicates that there exist latent problems in their theories, such as the dilemma of moral choice and the feasibility of practice in reality for a purely reflective heart-mind. See (Chan 2014, pp. 27–49).

the heart-mind as authority) is merely the first step for a mind in the phase of responding, but it still needs to positively tackle things in order to “win out over things” with himself never being hurt.

Before I touch on the Way of responding to outer things of the mind, the problem related to “the unavoidable” has to be handled once again. Zhuangzi mentioned the proper attitude towards “the unavoidable” many times. Not only did he say “make oneness your house and live with what cannot be avoided” (Watson 2013, p. 25) and “resign yourself to what cannot be avoided and nourish what is within you—this is best” (Watson 2013, p. 28) in order to stress the importance of “accepting” things contentedly, but he also had an insight into the role that “the unavoidable” plays when it comes to “responding” of the mind. The sage is someone “roused by something outside himself, only then does he respond; pressed, only then does he move; finding he has no choice, only then does he rise up” (Watson 2013, p. 120). Seen from this standpoint, “things cannot be avoided” not only manifest themselves as “workings of fate” for the virtuous, but also serve as the impetus for him/her to take an action. It is at the time of being roused and pressed by outer things that the sage starts to rise up and respond. Here is the underlying implication: for a sage, no constrained will attempting to take control over things exists and no contrived ideas are schemed in the heart-mind before acting to deal with things. In other words, the Perfect Man moves only when “the unavoidable” touches and propels him to respond, instead of being strained to conceive in accordance to with his established heart-mind beforehand.

After making clear the appropriate timing of action by means of “the unavoidable”, I shall now expand Zhuangzi’s view on the right way to respond. This could be summarized as, to “act in accordance with the state of affairs.” Besides, the meaning of “fact”, “the state of affairs” also includes “the nature of outer things” that has been fated already. Here is an example in the chapter of Mastering Life,

“Confucius was seeing the sights at Lüliang, where the water falls from a height of thirty fathoms and races and boils along for forty li, so swift that no fish or other water creature can swim in it. He saw a man dive into the water, and supposing that the man was in some kind of trouble and intended to end his life, he ordered his disciples to line up on the bank and pull the man out. However, after the man had gone a couple of hundred paces, he came out of the water and began strolling along the base of the embankment, his hair streaming down, singing a song”. (Watson 2013, p. 151).

Confucius marveled at the man’s superb skill and wondered if he had some special way of staying afloat in the water. The man answered:

“I have no way. I began with what I was used to, grew up with my nature, and let things come to completion with fate. I go under with the swirls and come out with the eddies, following along the way the water goes and never thinking about myself. That’s how I can stay afloat.”

Confucius said, “What do you mean by saying that you began with what you were used to, grew up with your nature, and let things come to completion with fate?” “I was born on the dry land and felt safe on the dry land—that was what I was used to. I grew up with the water and felt safe in the water—that was my nature. I don’t know why I do what I do—that’s fate” (Watson 2013, p. 152).

The man with amazing skill in swimming imparted his experience, which could be seen as a valuable lesson on how to act as a man of virtue. The secret to his staying afloat in the water is “following along the way the water goes” and “never thinking about himself.” That is, to act in accordance with the nature or natural tendency of things (“go under with the swirls and come out with the eddies”) and never follow the established heart-mind or intentional will. The highest level was attained when he completely forgot himself as well as the water and even did not know why he did what he did. It was a consummate state that he never consciously knew how to swim yet he was able to manage it spontaneously, which shares much similarity with “fate”, since the characteristic of “fate” is that we “never know why it is so but that is it” (不知其然而然也). That is why Zhuangzi’s words ended with “that’s fate.”

From this story, we learn that “fate”, in Zhuangzi’s view, has a richer content involving the spontaneous state of action through self-cultivation, as if dictated by providence instead of being done deliberately. During this process, the Way of heart-mind responding speaks for itself. The state of “fate” could only be experienced truly in practice by following along the specific Way or natural tendency of outer things, which is considered as the “Heavenly Way”.²⁵ Many scholars read it as a determinate pattern or an objective order in Nature which should be observed by rationality in subject–object dichotomy. However, this is not the whole story. Rather, it is more like a principle of value to follow that needs to be in the first place experienced and discovered by self-cultivation, revealing the genuine faith in Heaven that should be possessed by human beings. On the basis of this, to “follow the Way” connotes the attitude of guarding the “Heavenly order” in awe, which has a powerful emotional foundation other than a hollow ideal that is made up by reasoning. As Edward Slingerland points out, “Laws are something you merely obey. Values are something you feel” (Slingerland 2014, p. 176)²⁶ and “coming to some rational conclusion about the right way to act, and then trying to force your body to comply, simply doesn’t work” (Slingerland 2014, p. 120). It is an “emotion” resembling that of religious sentiments that can actually provide genuine motivation and which directly triggers action to accord with the state of affairs. However, sincere commitment to the “Heavenly Way” does not connote self-centered attachment to it. Instead, it means concentration on things with oneself gradually dissolved (“never thinking about himself”) to follow with it. After long-time practice, the state of spontaneity called “fate” appears as a natural outcome produced by such “forgetting” and “following”. It is not only unfolded in the practical activities related to skill but should also be deemed as the consummate state when it comes to tackling the real issues in reality. Only when we can “follow the Way” could a natural harmonious relationship with the situations be established and maintained.²⁷

5. The Relationship Interwoven in the Multiple Dimensions of Fate

We have analyzed the multiple meanings embodied in Zhuangzi’s thought on “fate”. So, what relationship among these layers of meanings could be established and what message can we see from such relationship?

It is clear that “fate” in the general common sense is not Zhuangzi’s main concern, but rather, it is set aside. What Zhuangzi really stressed and valued is our inner spiritual state towards the unavoidable. The concept of “fate” thus closely pertains to the “virtue” that is highlighted in Zhuangzi’s real intention. Additionally, as he stressed, “Virtue is the establishment of perfect harmony” (Watson 2013, p. 39), the virtuous man, as the ideal personality that Zhuangzi affirmed, is able to establish a harmonious relationship between Heaven and all myriad things in the universe.²⁸ He/She can not only live under the guidance of the Spirit of Heaven freely but also can interact well with the exterior world,

²⁵ Katia Lenehan elucidates the point of “following along” the “Heavenly Way” by citing the example of “Cook Ding cuts up an ox” (庖丁解牛) in the Chapter “The Secret of Caring for Life” to illustrate the profound implication of contented acceptance of fate. She says that “in the trajectory of destiny that man and things together accomplish according to their respective natures, one, with clarity achieved by self-cultivation, is able to meet all things with ease, harmonizing and following along in the way of letting things be themselves and letting one be oneself without hurting one another. If I have an insight and illumination into the nature of everything, I will surely find spaces among all things, act like a blade playing around in ‘plenty of room’ as if all restrictions and constraints never ever exist, this is what Zhuangzi’s wisdom truly reveals by acceptance of fate” (Lenehan 2020, p. 1395).

²⁶ Additionally, A.C. Graham formulates this problem from the standpoint of the relations between Heaven and the Human. He explains, “Chuang-tzu, to modify the cliché about Spinoza, a ‘Heaven-intoxicated man’. For him, it is not a matter of obeying Heaven; the sage ‘constantly goes by the spontaneous and does not add anything to the process of life’, he ‘lives the life generated by Heaven’” (Graham 1981, p. 15). The impulsion can only derive from the inner power and natural inclination for Heaven with a strong element of numinous awe.

²⁷ Paul J. D’Ambrosio comments on the story of Cook Ding, “Cook Ding’s blade is described as ‘rambling’ (‘playing’) through the spaces in the ox carcass. This connects rambling with the harmonization of situations with their concrete elements that the cook’s skill represents” (D’Ambrosio 2020, p. 64). The state of spontaneity which shares a similarity with fate denotes a mentality of rambling as well as an optimal relation that can be established with situations, especially in a social and ethical context.

²⁸ Chen Guying proposes that the humanist spirit of Daoism comprises not only the “harmony of man”, but also the “harmony of Heaven” and the “harmony of heart-mind”. Additionally, “The harmony of Heaven” is essentially looked on as the foundation of a harmonious social order in the mundane world (Chen 2012, p. 27). The three aspects of “harmony” collectively display what the “perfectness” means and this is demonstrated in the basic relationship with “Heaven and Earth”, others and oneself.

including things that seem unavoidable. It is the perfect harmony that deeply constitutes the essence of humanist spirit in Zhuangzi's thoughts on "fate".

More specifically, this means to completely accept what the "reality" or "fact" is and to entrust ourselves to "Heaven" without excessive emotions based on what is "human". Thus, fate, in Zhuangzi's opinion, is no longer an unavoidable and certain trajectory which predefines one's entire life, but a settled spiritual state that could be achieved. This is done by serving one's heart-mind to cultivate its virtue to the extent of treating things that cannot be avoided as if predefined. This could be seen as the highest form of "accepting". Based on such mentality, we can wholly devote ourselves to the unavoidable "fact" and then assume responsibilities on things in an effective way. More than that, Zhuangzi presented his substantial path to grasping "fate" in terms of heart-mind responding, that is, following along the specific Way or natural tendency of things resulting in spontaneous action by practice. This is also regarded as a manifestation of fate. Hence, the concept of fate, which goes through the three phases of mentality in the face of things that cannot be avoided, shows its significance in Zhuangzi's thoughts. It is not a concept indicating something predetermined by "Heaven". Neither does it bear a sense of helplessness when the unavoidable is confronted. On the contrary, from beginning to end, it exhibits how to face things objectively and positively. More precisely, the equanimity of acceptance, the embracing of facts with heart and soul, as well as effectively responding to things which leads to spontaneous action are all what "fate" imports. It thereby not only enables us to avoid suffering from the outside and inside, but also could facilitate an optimal outcome. Whether we can see this message and put it into practice depends upon the virtue cultivated since Zhuangzi's understanding of "fate" is combined with the cultivation of heart-mind all along. Therefore, the unavoidable is not counted as the thing predetermined by "Heaven" which is generally reckoned as a deity in charge of human fortunes and has to be accepted passively. Instead, it testifies to our virtue and provides possibilities to cultivate it in reality. Nevertheless, Heaven, not godly but naturally, still has sacred meanings therein. For Zhuangzi, things that happen to us are not simply the workings of an objectively natural Heaven that impose on our life, but demand humility and reverence. Serving as parents of human beings, the Heaven deserves our genuine gratitude and pleasure when it comes to accepting what has been endowed and rendered upon us. That certainly does not signify that we merely settle into it and do nothing. On the contrary, it means taking responsibility in an appropriate way. In other words, to act in accordance with the Way that is inherent in Heaven (the Heavenly Way of outer things). Fate thus becomes the synonym for spontaneity of action after relentless practice by conforming to the Heavenly Way, which is always reckoned as the consummate state of doing things. Thus, the step-by-step logical advance implied by the meaning of "fate" apparently proves Zhuangzi's humanistic spirit and practical wisdom in dealing harmoniously with issues in the real world.

We can now review the four typical points brought up by previous scholars, as mentioned in the beginning. One corresponding question could be raised: would the interpretative pattern that I propose above roughly comprise at least some aspects of the four and make them all legitimately understandable to some extent as well? Firstly, for Zhuangzi, fate is never simply deterministic, despite the fact that human beings do have limitations exerted from the world and life of their own. It cannot be explored clearly in essence and thus any concern about fate itself is futile and pointless. Additionally, fundamentally, we can conclude that things happen to us on the premise that Heaven is selfless and impartial. However, contentment with the unavoidable to the point of considering it as something predetermined is highly recommended, but this has its roots in one's supreme virtue. Secondly, Zhuangzi argued one step further, that it is of great consequence to immerse oneself in facts per se directly and thus exert one's full potential to address concrete affairs by following along the Heavenly Way until spontaneity of action is reached. Finally, the non-constricted action, which totally accords with the fact and the Way of outer things is prone to producing the best outcome. The spirit of creating and performing positively is thereby manifested. The four typical viewpoints held by

most scholars may thus be incorporated into the framework of explanation put forward in this essay.

6. Conclusions

I have given priority in this essay to Zhuangzi's crucial statements in the inner chapters concerning the concept of fate, centering on specifically profound meanings to be found within, so as to form a holistic picture of his theory on fate. First and foremost, Zhuangzi's real concern should be considered as the basis upon which to understand a deeper spirit behind it, which I have called "humanistic". In his discussion, Zhuangzi emphasized the virtue to be cultivated with regard to fate. This involves an acceptance of the situation one faces by forgetting oneself (getting rid of superfluous emotions and not following the established heart-mind) and immersing oneself in the state of affairs so as to do what has to be done. This is a peaceful settling in terms of heart-mind receiving. At the same time, the heart-mind is reacting to events in terms of following the Heavenly Way through long-term practice to the extent of attaining spontaneous performance. Throughout, "virtue" is the main thread which consistently goes through Zhuangzi's overall understanding of fate. This understanding involves unique insight into "Heaven" (especially the "Spirit of Heaven and Earth"). It is on the basis of a radical comprehension of "Heaven" that a brand-new view of fate and how human beings should respond is formed. Zhuangzi also elucidated what fate connotes in terms of his own distinctive existential grasp on moral values. The conventional interpretations of Zhuangzi's concept of fate which we have discussed can be integrated within the hermeneutical discussion of this paper.

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