

PRELIMINARY MEDITATIONS

A. Invitation by a Butterfly

1. You have at hand, my dear reader, Chuang Tzu's first three chapters, undisturbed—their poetic texts, their literal translations, their glosses, and meditations thereon. All this is self-reflexive, yet it opens out to the reader. This is, I dare say, a poetic invitation by a butterfly, in the form of its journal. We remember that butterfly. It is the one dreamed by Chuang Tzu, that Taoist bum in China during the fourth century before Jesus Christ was born.¹

From such simple information we can gather several things. First, Chuang Tzu dreamed of being the butterfly, and so it belongs to him. Yet it has some advantages over him. It can flutter freely among the flowers; he cannot. It is innocent; he is not. It may be currently dreaming of being him; he, now that he is awake, cannot. His name, "Chuang Chou" was given by his parents and is not himself; the butterfly has no such problem, because it has no name. Its essence is fluttering—from one idea to another, one event to another, one life to another, fluttering from a dream to its awakening to another dream. It does not deny the distinction between awakening and dreaming, reality and illusion, knowledge and ignorance, Chuang Chou and butterfly, or even the reality of uncertainty. It just affirms its situation as it "flutters" from one thing to another. Its "name" is fluttering.

We must be warned, however, against "investigating" the dream as some of the wise philosophers do, asking whether dream is an "experience," whether it is "verifiable," whether in a dream "error" is possible.² Asking such questions is like asking what shape the wind and clouds have. The wind is neither square nor round, any more than dreaming is waking. Error, experience, and verification are notions of the waking world; they have as much to do with dream as the wind and clouds have with shape. Such investigation entangles us in much gobbledygook. We might as well try to catch and store the wind in a box.

In any case, dear reader, count yourself fortunate. You can enjoy and follow a butterfly fluttering back and forth between dream and reality without denying either. You will flutter with it between ancient China and the modern West. You will live vigorously and zestfully.

Thus this journal is an invitation. You are invited to join in our common

joy of meditative fluttering, continuing the journal. *This* journal is thus incomplete. You are now one of the butterflies that play life—have you seen any butterfly that does not enjoy fluttering? Whether or not you are the butterfly or Chuang Tzu may be an interesting question, but it does not detract from your enjoying yourself.

2. But how about death—can we enjoy that? If the birth of a baby is joy to everyone, why is not death as joyous? After all, both are events that bring to pass something new—one to come into life, the other to complete it, and that with an added lived experience of going out of life. If it is fun to come in and begin life, it must be fun also to finish it and get out. If change is the spice (if not the essence) of life, I cannot see why changing-out-of a particular life cannot be as much fun as changing-into it.

Of course change is accompanied by a little dizziness. An airplane takes off. It rocks and soars; we feel dizzy. Soon it stabilizes itself and we enjoy the scenery. Then it comes down. Again, we are rocked and dizzy at things getting bigger. Then the landing, and people on the plane look relieved. Death is a landing. We should be “relieved.”

Or perhaps it is rather like this. After landing we deplane to go to our new schedule of living. “Deplaning” is another departure, another beginning, for something new. Our “deplaning” from life may well be another beginning of something new. Chuang Tzu imagined so in his Chapter Two, lines 245–49. The disappearance of the plane, that ordinary daily living of ours, should be an exciting thing.

Does this require reincarnation? Not necessarily, for even if there is no reincarnation, a disappearance is as much fun as reincarnation; we remember Buddha wanted Nirvana, a “blow off.” And Chuang Tzu gleefully learned from talking with a (his own?) skull.³

There are at least four possibilities after death—simple disappearance of this earthly body, its glorification, its continuation as before, or else things getting more miserable. And any of these possibilities can give us joy.

If death is our simple disappearance, it would also be a disappearance of sorrows and worries, and we won’t be worrying about our disappearance. If death is our glorification, nothing can be better; it should be a celebration.⁴ In either case we cannot understand why we are sad at the deathbed.

If death is a continuation of the life we have lived, we should also rejoice in death because we have a second chance. Even if we are caught in the pre-determined wheel of eternal returns to the same life, Nietzsche and Camus are at our side to give us the courage of Zarathustra and Sisyphus.⁵

And, to think of it, words of comparison such as “same” and “different” make no sense in this context. They can be said of my life only by one who is (1) both in and out of myself and (2) remembers my past life. But there is none such except, perhaps, God. Even if a god existed he is not myself; *I* cannot feel pain because of his knowledge of my life eternally recurring. Besides, as a butterfly I can always find some new meanings in the “same” life, whether the last life or the next. All in all, there exists no eternal recurrence for the butterfly whose “name” is fluttering.

What if death leads us to a *worse* situation than now? We must remember that misery comes from a misfit between our life-of-desire and the environment. “Misfit” is a correlative term like “quarrel”; two parties have to agree to disagree, to quarrel. When we forget our desires (and ourselves) their “quarrel” with the environment simply cannot happen. More on this theme later.⁶

Death is as much of a change as birth is. Birth is a joy; death should also be. Whatever “goods” my birth (I use “good” as a verb) also “goods” my death.⁷ The fact that we love life shows that every day is good; since death is an everyday occurrence, every death is also good. Not to think so is itself a misery. (Now do not tell me to look at miseries and frustrations around us. They are late comers on the heel of our decision not to think every day a good.)

“Oh, no; you are wrong,” a sophist-logician like Hui Shih (a good friend of Chuang Tzu) would say. Birth is a positive (gain); death is a negative (loss). If the first change is joy, the second change should be sorrow. Our butterfly answers, “This is valid only if you think of ‘positive’ and ‘negative,’ not of ‘change.’” Both are changes—change in one direction is as much of a change as change in an opposite direction. “Gain” and “loss” are terms of desire, not of change.⁸ Or rather, gain and loss are cages of obsession, not of desire. It is one thing to desire something, it is another to be obsessed with it, such as with gain. Once we let go of that obsession, we see that loss is fun, too. For what are sports and sportsmanship for?

No player wants to lose the game, of course. Yet the unbeatable team spoils the game; eliminating all defeats eliminates the game itself. The defeat teaches us not just how to win next time but, more importantly, how to take it like a man. The point of the game is not (just) to win but to cultivate sportsmanship through defeats, as well as victories.

One plays a game in order to enjoy it; to enjoy the game is to experience the excitements of its ups and downs, to “enjoy” its “changing” tides. So in life, the point of which is to *enjoy* the excitements of the *changes*, its wins and losses, even death—for only life experiences its death. No defeat, no game; no death, no game of life.

3. Conversation with Hui Shih the sophist reminds us that Chuang Tzu has a position of no position. This strange description can be clarified by comparing Chuang Tzu with Confucius and Hui Shih.

Compared with Confucius, Chuang Tzu's position is that of *no position*, opposing the orthodoxy which destroys humanness by artificially promoting a definite position. Here Chuang Tzu has a position whose content is *no position* in contrast to that of Confucius.

Nonetheless, it remains that Chuang Tzu does have a *position* of no position, opposing Hui Shih the sophist who has no position at all. Hui Shih's is a sophism, pure negation wallowing in logical nonsense and dazzling platitudes.

Having no position of his own, Hui Shih is intent only on attacking others. He ends up in a dead end. As a thinker, he naturally wants to spread his view universally. Yet since all he does is pure negation, his universalized negation must also apply to himself. Thus he has to negate himself, and becomes unable to negate any more. In the end, Hui Shih has nowhere to pillow his head.

In contrast, by opposing Hui Shih's opposition, Chuang Tzu does affirm (by way of opposition) every view, including his own way of "no-position" and opposition, without being stuck in it. Life is larger than logic; in life *p* is not exactly not-not-*p*. Insistence on *p* indicates an "orthodox" dogmatic affirmation; insistence on not-*p* is a sophistic iconoclasm. Assuming not-not-*p* indicates an affirmation without affirmation, an affirmation that accommodates opposition, a position of no position, an affirmative non-position.

By opposing opposition, Chuang Tzu has two non-positions. First, Chuang Tzu can tarry like a butterfly wherever he happens to be and then flutter away, leaving no trace behind. Chuang Tzu enjoys roaming nonchalance, at home everywhere without claiming anywhere his home.

Secondly, Chuang Tzu's non-position enables him to *use* Confucius and Hui Shih for Chuang Tzu's own self-expression. In his polemic with Hui Shih, Chuang Tzu does not just debate but enjoys Hui Shih's eristics, inviting Hui Shih also to enjoy it together. How much Chuang Tzu treasured such dialogical enjoyment is shown at Hui Shih's grave where Chuang Tzu sorely missed him as Chuang Tzu's "partner" or "material."⁹ This is not a selfish use of Hui Shih but a cooperation between an artist and his partner-material, an exquisite sharing of creative enjoyment in mutual echoing and responding. Chuang Tzu also responded to Confucius both negatively and positively, now criticizing Confucius, now affectionately calling him "Chung Ni," now putting Lao Tzu's thoughts in Confucius' mouth, honorifically calling Confucius "K'ung Tzu," perhaps hinting that Confucius was after all promoting being himself and natural, as Chuang Tzu has been arousing us to be all along.¹⁰

Thus Chuang Tzu's is a position of no position, soaring beyond others' positions by sauntering among them.

4. The book of *Chuang Tzu* consists of stories and sayings. Sayings can be arguments and their poetic parodies, rhymed or not. Stories are not epic, ornate, or eerie, but spicy and memorable.

Confucius said that to ponder poetry is to "know what is to come when told what has happened." This is in fact what "learning" is, repeatedly to "warm up the old and know the new," to "revert [extrapolate] to the three [corners of the square] when one is lifted."¹¹ Similarly, Chu Hsi said of Confucius' *Analects* that we must spend time repeatedly meditating on the implications hidden in the passage, whether outwardly simple or abstruse.¹² Such is the peculiarly Chinese way of *reading* worthy writings.

We must likewise tarry and dwell on the *Chuang Tzu*; its passages echo our life situations. To chew on them, to draw implications from them, is to meditate on the meaning of life. To enjoy them is to enjoy life.

But why not enjoy life itself; why bother with the *Chuang Tzu*? Chuang Tzu himself says something similar, that we must forget words once we get their intention, as we forget the net once we get the fish. Yet he continues, "Where can I get a man who forgets words so I can have a word with him?"¹³ Why?

To make sense of life we can do nothing better than tell stories about it. Jean-Paul Sartre said,

...a man is always a teller of stories, ...he sees everything which happens to him through these stories; and he tries to live his life as if it were a story he was telling. ...While you live, nothing happens. The scenery changes, people come in and go out, that's all. There are no beginnings ...an interminable and monotonous addition. ...But when you tell about a life, everything changes; ...events take place in one direction, and we tell about them in the opposite direction. ...I wanted the moments of my life to follow each other and order themselves like those of a life remembered. I might as well try to catch time by the tail.¹⁴

Thus, to live humanly is to tell, to tell is to produce coherence, and to have coherence is to live humanly. Such coherence is elusive as a living fish, and the net of story-telling and mock-arguing is always needed to "catch time by the tail."

The beauty of Chuang Tzu's fishing net is that it resembles the fish, for here both the net and the fish need to be pursued. Chuang Tzu's sayings are too elusive for us comfortably to sit back and receive; to read them is to be aroused

to ponder. And such is the way of netting a fish, catching our “time by its tail,” its significance—and such is a human way of living.

We get the coherence of life through Chuang Tzu’s fishing net. Lived coherence is neither a metaphysical system nor a rambling, neither analytically logical nor simply illogical, neither absurd nor calculable. Lived coherence is vast and vibrant, flexing itself like a fishing net to whatever comes.

Our human obligation is to discern and to live such “coherence.” We cannot live without meaning; we live coherently and meaningfully or we die (as human). As we ponder on the *Chuang Tzu* we are in touch with lived meaning and coherence. We come to enjoy ourselves in it, come what may. And in doing so we add meaning of our own, proving ourselves to be life’s creative participants. We discern and live, thereby enhance life. We change life by making life coherent, and *we* are in the meantime changed by living the coherence we continually create. Such is sensible living, our life imperative. To read the *Chuang Tzu* is to live it, thereby rightly living and enriching our lives.

5. I have so far invited you to join Chuang Tzu’s butterfly, or a butterfly’s “Chuang Chou”—to enjoy fluttering about between knowledge and uncertainty, dreaming and waking, life and death. Such fluttering is in a position of no position, as opposed to Confucius (with a specific position) and Hui Shih (with no position whatever).

But who am *I* who thus invite you? What does this “invitation” amount to? “I” am one of your friends, sharing with you what I have found and how much I enjoyed fluttering with Chuang Tzu, the friend to us all. And so the invitation and the pages that follow expresses such companionship. This is a *Companion*, not commentary, to Chuang Tzu’s writing. The next Meditation elaborates on this.

B. Why Companion, Not Commentary

1. The excitement, and so the problem, of studying the *Chuang Tzu* is twofold: (a) We must be “contemporaneous” (to borrow from Kierkegaard) with Chuang Tzu, that is, living the same time, life, and experience in the cultural and historical world of Chuang Tzu. This is a general problem in studying any historical document. (b) Besides, we must be evoked to live our lives as we never have lived. There is in Chuang Tzu an undiminished novelty that is *ours* to live. This is the peculiar challenge of studying Chuang Tzu. To consult textual criticism, the traditional commentary, helps solve the first

problem; to have a “Companion” should help meet the second challenge. We must now see how this is so.

The book of *Chuang Tzu* has many memorable vibrant phrases. To codify them—that is, authoritatively to parse and interpret them, to revere and follow them into indisputable standards for all truths and things—quickly turns Chuang Tzu into an orthodoxy. Nothing is deadlier to Chuang Tzu than a Chuang Tzu scholasticism which enbalsms him in the temple of scholarship; he would rather be a turtle dragging its tail in the mud of real obscure living.

Søren Kierkegaard said that one can truly follow one’s master only after the master’s death.¹⁵ Confucius would have agreed, but in a way perhaps surprising to Kierkegaard. Confucius said, “I transmit, I do not create”;¹⁶ he *thereby* revolutionized the tradition, radically democratizing the notion of “gentleman,” universalizing the “heavenly decree,” and insisting that becoming an upright individual is the first and the last requirement of a good ruler. That is what “transmitting the ancients” means. H. J. Paton, hardly a radical thinker, said of “traditions” and “the wisdom of our fathers”:

If we are to take the past as our guide, it is hard to see why we should follow the past ages in everything except in the one thing which makes them great, that is to say, in attempting like them to add something to human knowledge and ... achievement. Mere imitation will contribute nothing to the sum of human values. ... Even where we accept and seek to follow an authority, we cannot avoid the necessity of independent thought. The mere commentator may help others to understand, but he does not understand himself. To understand a past thinker we must think again as he thought, and to do so is not a matter of analyzing arguments and comparing texts, but of having the same experience and wrestling with the same problems. Without memory we cannot think, but we cannot make memory a substitute for thought.¹⁷

All this is profound and true. A phrase, however, gives us pause, “having the same experience.” It is true that we must have the same experience of “adding something to human achievement.” Yet “adding something” is to add something *new*, which cannot be the “same” with the past. When something is as new (different) as the other is, it is as unique and unrepeatable as the other. Both are the “same” in being different from each other.

Forest fires come; trees turn into ashes. Saplings then shoot up to the skies, as if none had done so before, just as the parent trees did before—thanks to the parents, thanks to *their* ashes, thanks to *their* clearings.

Such understanding of “following the tradition” revolutionizes the hermeneutics of classical texts. For example, a typical textual investigation of Chuang Tzu goes as follows: A word or phrase was used “thus and thus” by

writers of Chuang Tzu's period, or by Chuang Tzu himself somewhere else; therefore, Chuang Tzu *must* also mean "thus and thus" in this particular place.

This assumes that Chuang Tzu never meant otherwise than he or other writers had meant before. But he did not promise us so; no writer does. One of the excitements of a good writer lies precisely in the subtle shift of meaning he commands as he writes.

Excitement differs from haphazardness, however. For the author *has* been influenced by other writers and has used that word "thus and thus" before. He may now want to use the word differently, as required by the new subject matter on hand; but his use is "different" only in terms of his and others' previous usage. The shift of usage is the shift of the past usage. Thus the excitement of the shift is recognizable in terms of (i) the past usage and (ii) the subject matter on hand. Textual investigation helps us on (i), but not much on (ii), which is yet the reason we read a writer.

Akatzuka Tadashi noted that Chuang Tzu has bits of contemporary myths and legends in the first chapter;¹⁸ Akatzuka failed to see what such adoption of myth bits *means*. In his second chapter Chuang Tzu used notions current among commoners and philosophers; A. C. Graham pointed out some philosophical notions, yet missed common ones.¹⁹ Both Akatzuka and Graham missed the fact that Chuang Tzu did not quote current notions and stories but *used* them as he liked. Furthermore, many commentators (such as Akatzuka, Han Shan, Fukunaga Mitsuji) pay exclusive attention to such notions as "one," "nothing," negations of the "many" and of wordly wranglings, and interpret all passages in this light.²⁰ They also tend to look to other writings and other occurrences in the *Chuang Tzu*, instead of *staying* with a specific passage, wrestling with it. This results in a version of Chuang Tzu that is vaguely nihilistic and otherwordly. The version no longer has Chuang Tzu's original vigor, intimate discernment, tantalizing obscurity, surprising freshness.

Thus, textual criticism has a negative function. It establishes *rough parameters* of meaning we can attribute to Chuang Tzu's phrases. We must respect such *parameters*; we cannot attribute to Chuang Tzu a meaning completely foreign to the usage in the ancient world, however prevalently meanings of this sort are adopted today. And yet any parameter of meaning is only a rough outline. As mentioned above, we cannot claim that since the writers of Chuang Tzu's times did not use the phrase in this sense, Chuang Tzu could never have meant this sense by the phrase. After all, we share a common humanness with people in Chuang Tzu's period, and the very purpose of Chuang Tzu's writing is to shock us out of common sense—and he was especially concerned with the common sense of his own period.

Thus we must appeal to our common humanity while dwelling in Chuang Tzu's writings, until we can intuitively move in his overall sentiment and thrust. At the same time, such perception itself must not be unrelated to the rough parameters of meaning established by painstaking research on textual-critical matters. In short, our understanding of the text is a subtle embodiment of the literary thrust and objective textual research.

2. Ch'en Ch'i-t'ien said that there are three difficulties in studying the *Chuang Tzu*—difficulties of deciphering the ancient text of Chuang Tzu, of interpreting his strange stories, and of discerning their philosophical import. To resolve these difficulties we must naturally start with textual exegesis. This is why so many commentaries keep appearing. Then he advised that among many commentaries those by Kuo Hsiang, Chiao Hung, Kuo Ch'ing-fan, and Ch'ien Mu are most comprehensive.²¹

It must be agreed that the difficulty of reading the *Chuang Tzu* is at least threefold, and that the textual-exegetical labors are an indispensable start toward understanding the text. We cannot, however, understand the *Chuang Tzu* by textual labor alone. We must further go on to ponder the implications of the text. Few have tackled the latter task.²²

We think that the original text from Chuang Tzu's hand was intended to challenge our usual sense of rationality, but came unfortunately to be mingled with later emendations by the admirers, syncretists, textual copyists. It is now difficult if not impossible to disentangle the "wheat" of the original text from the "chaff" of extraneous additions and changes.

To make the matter worse, the *Chuang Tzu* challenges our common sense, which is our final arbiter in textual critical investigations. And so our textual hermeneutics has three pitfalls:

- (i) Our usual critical rationality could be trusted to delete "unintelligible" passages and relocate "irrelevant" ones. An emaciated text, to our taste, emerges.
- (ii) The text as a whole could be worshipped and swallowed, and we merely recite the text in irresponsible irrationality.
- (iii) We could, by "weaving sense and nonsense," produce a "seamless whole" text. It now "cracks under the multiple strains of [our] craft," which in translation turns the *Chuang Tzu* into a "bland evasive English."²³

If most translators (Giles, Legge, Watson) bordered on danger *iii*, then Graham is unique in leaning toward danger *i*, while many Chinese commen-

tators tend to danger *ii*. These dangers are theoretically not unavoidable. We could heed the warning of textual critical scholarship against danger *ii*, while exercising our discernment and judgment against danger *i*; then danger *iii* will take care of itself.

Sadly, this is easier said than done. Trying to avoid dangers *ii* and *iii*, Graham not only falls into danger *i* but also clutters the text with unwieldy jargon. *Shih* (just to take Chapter Two) is rendered “‘That’s it’ which goes by circumstance”; *wei shih* is “‘That’s it’ which deems.” Both are, however, words of daily usage picked up by logicians and thinkers, and can simply be rendered as “yes, this” and “for this reason.”

All the preceding three dangers came from regarding the *Chuang Tzu* as a definitive, serious, scholarly disputation. The commentators and translators have completely disregarded the textual principle repeatedly put forth in the *Chuang Tzu* itself, which said, for example,

He [Chuang Tzu] expounded them [his views] in odd and outlandish terms, in brash and bombastic language, in unbound and unbordered phrases, ... not looking at things from one angle only. He believed that the world was drowned in turbidness and that it was impossible to address it in sober language. So he used ‘goblet words’ to pour out endless changes, ‘double-rayed words’ to give a ring of truth, and ‘lodged words’ to impart greater breadth. ... Though his writings are a string of queer beads and baubles, ... they are crammed with truths that never come to an end.²⁴

In short, the book was meant to be a satirical stab in the back of our convention and common sense. We need, not just rational scholarship (textual-philological, socio-historical, cultural-philosophical), but a liberal dose of *sensitivity*—literary and rational. Graham’s textual sensitivity is most helpful. We must go further. But how?

At least five questions can be asked about the *Chuang Tzu*:

- (1) What does the tradition (the ancients) say about the book?
- (2) What does Chuang Tzu say in the book?
- (3) How does he say it?
- (4) What does he mean?
- (5) Why does he say so?

A vast number of exegetes wrote on the traditions of interpretation (question 1).²⁵ A few wrote on the contents and the style of the *Chuang Tzu* (questions 2 and 3).²⁶ Very few wrote on what Chuang Tzu meant (question 4), which is usually taken to be identical with an interpretive tradition (question 1). None wrote on why Chuang Tzu says what he says and in such

a manner (question 5), which is usually buried under their busy concerns with historical circumstances.

Many thinkers (Confucius, Chu Hsi) can be understood by identifying what is said (question 2) with what is meant, thus making moot the questions about what is meant and why it is said (questions 4 and 5). This is how we handle disputation that is literal and serious. In contrast, Chuang Tzu evokes our reflection by ambiguities and elusive metaphors. He does not say what he means; he does not even point to what he means, which is less important than what is aroused. The difficulty, and so the fascination, of Chuang Tzu is that he peculiarly requires *our* involvement. Such involvement gives rise to the preceding five questions, each distinct from the other.

This does not mean that nothing definite is in Chuang Tzu or that what he says is not important. What he says directs what he evokes, which has a relatively definite range. But what will be evoked in the reader is not completely known. The *Chuang Tzu* is alive, with a character.

We do have the so-called Chuang Tzu scholarship, but it does not help us understand Chuang Tzu in the manner in which the comparable Chu Hsi scholarship helps us understand Chu Hsi. Scholarship usually means a concern with the tradition of interpretation (question 1); reading Chuang Tzu only in such traditional light leads us *away* from Chuang Tzu. That familiar Japanese adage, "He who reads 'Confucius' misses Confucius,"²⁷ (echoed by Mencius' warning—"Better be without the book than giving it full credence!"²⁸) applies here with a fatal vengeance. To be trapped in the Chuang Tzu tradition (question 1) is to be embalmed in historical irrelevance.

3. Commentary as such follows the hermeneutical tradition, authorizes definitive readings, and establishes the text in the shrine of the Classics. No literary activity is more lethal to Chuang Tzu's spirit. An "authoritative commentary to the *Chuang Tzu*" is as hazardingly irrelevant as an "authoritative commentary" to Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, or Gabriel Marcel.²⁹

In contrast, the "companion" answers and continues Chuang Tzu's call, "Where can I get a man who forgets words so I can have a word with him?"³⁰ The companion attempts with critical sensibility to transmit the seismic impacts of Chuang Tzu's sayings on our taken-for-granted life, preserving all his tantalizing ambiguities.

The authoritative bookishness of a commentary enshrines the turtle shell, killing the vigor of a living turtle wagging its tail (implications) in the mud of textual and lived ambiguities. The free individuality of a companion highlights and savors the intention of the *Chuang Tzu*—free individual concord.

The condescendingly called Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters in the *Chuang Tzu* are actually an early collection of such “companion” essays evoked by the Inner Chapters. They belong to the big circle of “friends”³¹ called “the *Chuang Tzu*.” This *Companion* (with all its defects) aspires to continue and expand that critical circle of friends.

Accompanying the reader, the “companion” enables him to read the text on his own and “reach his own interpretation” of it, as Max Black puts it in the Preface to his *Companion to Wittgenstein’s “Tractatus”*. Then Black says that there “can be no question ... of any ‘definitive’ reading” of the *Tractatus* because his own views “have oscillated” while he was writing.³² He does not aim at the authoritative interpretation, but perhaps at helping the reader savor the excitements of the *Tractatus*, as this *Companion* to the *Chuang Tzu* does.

Interestingly one can, while writing a companion, change one’s mind. One cannot, while writing an authoritative commentary; “authoritative” means *definitive*, that is, unchanging. In contrast, changing one’s mind while writing shows how the text excites the reader; the excitement qualifies him to write a companion effectively to transmit the text’s power of excitement to other readers.

4. I am not a professional historian or literary critic, and so am qualified to try such a companion. Not being a historian, I need not wear the mask of analytical objectivity; not being a literary critic, I need not complicate explanation by excessive rigor. I eagerly absorb advice from historians and literary critics, then throw away half of it. My criterion is my discernment gained by personal dwelling, with their help, in the *Chuang Tzu*.

The purpose here is to call attention and to invite you, the reader, to plunge into the *Chuang Tzu* without prejudice. You would soon realize, as I repeatedly have, that to plunge into the *Chuang Tzu* is to plunge into yourself and into your world. A concrete example of such hermeneutical transmission is given in Meditation C.

C. Conversation With A Roadside Skull

Let us take a delightful story in one of the so-called Outer Chapters, Chapter Eighteen, where Chuang Tzu supposedly had a dream conversation with a skull at the roadside. Not believing in the skull’s confession about its self-enjoyment, Chuang Tzu asked if it wanted him to ask the Arbiter of Fate to restore its former life with its body, family, and friends.

The skull frowned severely, wrinkling up its brow. "Why would I throw away more happiness than that of a king on a throne and take on the troubles of a human being again?" It said.³³

1. I have eight points about the story:

(1) A scholarly consideration may go like this. The story is definitely from the hand of a late Taoist friend of Chuang Tzu's, for at least two reasons:

First, the story is pervaded with too much otherworldliness, not like Chuang Tzu's usual mood, as Kuo Hsiang, as well as Tsuda Saikichi,³⁴ would have said.

Second, the final scene, as quoted above, gave away the clumsiness of a later writer who inadvertently forgot that a skull has no brow to knit, much less a tongue to speak with, or brain cells to think and enjoy life with. (I omit all other considerations about literary style and phraseology.)

(2) However, if we forget such debate based on common sense (which Chuang Tzu wanted to challenge anyway) and simply read the story, then we will feel a breeze going through *our* skulls. We feel liberated; we realize that we have been carrying our skulls as we live on. We can knit our brows and still live on as if we had only skulls and nothing else.

And then we realize that this story is for us who are alive and yet carry death as we live on. This is a profoundly *this*-worldly story then. The very fact that the author lets the skull knit its brow connects it with the living, who have both skull and brow. Thus we have by-passed all the scholarly debate.

(3) Yet literary criticism in the preceding fashion does have its function; by adhering to common sense the criticism calls our attention to the story's departures from common sense. Such departures alert us to the author's intention and deepen our appreciation of the story in our own way.

(4) In any case, that the above description of point 2 agrees with Chuang Tzu's overall sentiment can be seen by checking 6/45ff, 18/15ff, 22/9, 77ff.

(5) Let us continue our thoughts on point 2. Enjoy our living death—this is the story's message. This contrasts with the prevalent mood in some existential literature, such as Kierkegaard's "sickness unto death" (despair) or Camus' defiance against the "absurdity of life" (disintegration of our life-accomplishments in death). Chuang Tzu's *living* in death makes life enjoyable; we live as if we were already dead.

Such living differs also from the Buddhist way of life which counsels us to *die* during our daily living. Since everything is vacant, to the point that even the notion of vacancy is vacant of meaning, there is no point in committing suicide. The base line is death, in which life matters little; we die while living. In contrast, the brow-knitting of the skull has its eyes (?) on enjoyment. It *lives*

with the heaven and earth, with which it makes seasons, as if it were the king on the throne. The skull lives on, and it is such skull-living that Chuang Tzu proposed. When Chuang Tzu tapped the skull and slept on it as pillow, the skull's vibration of joy resonated into Chuang Tzu. Such resonance is called "conversation in a dream."

(6) But who wrote this story? To say it is a later disciple or friend of Chuang Tzu does not help answer the question. For the skull-to-skull resonance is so personal a matter that no one other than Chuang Tzu himself would have known it. Perhaps "Chuang Tzu" here functions as "Chuang Chou" does at the end of the second chapter. "Chuang Tzu" is a *wo*—the identifiable, objectifiable self, to be looked at and talked with. Who then is conversing with the skull? It must be the authentic transcendental *cogito*, the *wu* which begins the second chapter.

That is to say, the conversation with the skull must have been that between the *wo*-skull and the *wu-cogito*-self of Chuang Tzu. Such conversation later "leaked out" into the conversation among friends in whom "there was no disagreement in their hearts," saying,

Who can look upon nonbeing as his head, on life as his back, and on death as his rump? ...Who knows that life and death, existence and annihilation, are all a single body? I will be his friend!³⁵

The "conversation" here is the resonance of the self with the self, and the resonance of the self with other selves.

Everyone alive literally sleeps every night, pillowed on his skull. This conversation is then a universal one, a continuation of the meditative joy of that butterfly dream that concludes the second chapter, and of that nourishing dance through suffering that pervades the third chapter.

(7) The dry empty skull has three reasons for its joy that can never be taken away: It is a skull, it is dry, and it is empty.

(a) There may be a roadside skull, but there cannot be a roadside skull-in-general. The *skull* is unmistakably that of a particular individual; it is "mine."

(b) Not even the devil (if any), much less vultures, wolves, and earthworms, would take a second look at it. For it is a *dry* skull; no one would care to touch it, much less harm it.

(c) This dry skull is dry because it is empty; I cannot get any *emptier*. Yet it is still myself and no one else. Being the lowliest bottom to which I can go, the I/it is invincible.

Thus the dry skull is my identity which no one dreams of taking away. This

is my ultimate emptiness, my ultimate self and safety, therefore my ultimate joy, me and my dry skull.

What joy? Well, now that its skin and flesh are shed, its blood dried, it ages no longer, but makes its happy rounds of seasons with the heaven and earth.

“With the heaven and earth [it] makes [rounds of] spring and autumn” (18/27) is the neat phrase casually tossed out by the dry roadside skull to describe its ineffable joy. “The heaven and earth” is nature; “spring and autumn” is the round of seasons. “With nature to make seasons” is to let nature roll in season after season, to let all spaces be at all times, to roll space and time into one—in short, to let things be as they are. This is joy unperturbed through ups and downs, season after season. The entire universe contributes to the skull’s making of happy seasons.

“With the skies and the earth to make the spring and the autumn,” said the roadside skull, the death at any roadside on life’s way. Death is as close to me as the skies that cover me and the earth in which I live, every day of the season. Every day, in its turn, is as vast and eternal as the skies above and the earth around. I *am* my skull, as much at home in death as I am in the skies and the earth, in my everyday life. Death is as close as my life, and my life as close as my death; and so if I desire my life I should desire my death, and live on with my skull at any roadside of my life. And then my life will be as happy as that joy of the dry skull on the roadside, “making the spring and the autumn with the heaven and earth.”

This phrase describes or, rather, presents the essence of the roadside skull’s joy. How? In two ways.

First, the moment of experience is the event in the spatio-temporal atmosphere (*ch’i*), as expressed in the usual poetic phrase, “pine wind.” It is space (pine) and it is time (wind), co-happening, co-steeping, con-fused—an experiential Hun Tun. We isolate the words and arrange them into an orderly logical explication—“winds in the pines,” “winds through the pines”—and then the primal integrity of the initial concreteness is lost. The original impact is “pine wind,” not to be tampered with, but to be felt with our senses, our spine, our life.

When, secondly, such experiential integrity goes as vast as the skies and the fields, and as endless as the springs through the autumns, the experience *makes* the universe in all its spatio-temporal richness. And such is the joy of the roadside skull whose subjecthood (he is *someone’s* skull) is intact and whose subjectiveness is empty (he is dead). There exists “pure experience,” devoid of all distortions and encumbrances of the flesh and blood—fatigue, boredom, selfishness.

Crickets must have played hide and seek in the skull both among themselves and with their predators. Insects must have come in for cover during the summer heat and rain, and during the winter cold and wind, if they were still around. Field mice may have nibbled at it for calcium, and found it less palatable than horns shed by deer. And it outlived all of them. Night hootings of the owl filled it with echoes of the sleepy moon, barely seen in the cracks of the clouds. Half hidden in the blowing dust, the skull blended in with the scene of the wild.

Thus the skull forever gazes at the skies and the fields, happily making its seasons with them. “No one bothers it, as it bothers no one.” “Joy unspeakable which is yet no joy,” joy vainly sought by emperors and tycoons, moralists and mystics, just comes and stays when the spring comes, and comes again and stays again when the autumn comes. “All changes are gone through into one,” as “the under-heaven is safely tucked away in the under-heaven.” All this is mine as long as I live with my own skull. To live with my own skull amounts to living with the heaven and the earth, season after season.

And so, my dear reader, when you are sad or hurt, frown with your own skull, on which you pillow your sleep every night. You will end up finding no frowning. Live as your skull does—with the heaven and earth, season after season.

This is Buddhism in reverse. Buddhism says that every *thing* is merely an aggregate of thing-elements, which in turn are puffs of imagination, unreal. Chuang Tzu says things are like music (“piping”?). Music is made of rubbings-together of things and their elements—metal, hollows, vibrations. Music is beautiful, and beautiful things are made of their skulls, their inanimate thing-elements. This is the musical joy of skulls. And so all these pairs are real and beautiful—skull and joy, the inanimate and the animate, things and heaven-and-earth. They interchange and integrate. Beautiful! Where is your hurt now?

(8) But does this description of “*i* (heaven-earth) *wei* (spring-autumn)” exhaust its meaning? Not quite. This description tends to confuse instrumental *with* (*i*) with together *with* (*yü*) and to confuse *treating-regarding wei* with *making-doing wei*. And such confusion brings out Chuang Tzu’s style of writing. Let me elaborate.

Usually “*i* (*a*) *wei* (*b*)” means at least two things: (1) “With *a* as material to make (*wei*) *b*”—in this case, with the heaven and earth as material to make the rounds of seasons. This differs from “our springs and autumns are as endless as heaven and earth” (Watson, 193), much less “participating in the making of seasons with heaven and earth.” (2) Another connotation in com-

mon usage is that *a* is not *b*, but it is now made as *b*, as in “*i* (you) *wei* (father)” or “*i* (enemy) *wei* (friend).” Properly speaking, *a* is not *b* (“you” are not “father,” “enemy” is not “friend”), but now is made as, that is, recognized and treated as, *b*.

With this linguistic convention, the paradox of Chuang Tzu’s phrase is manifest. Three points can be raised:

(i) (a) Given the linguistic convention, the phrase means that heaven-earth is not properly to be treated as spring-autumn, which the skull now does. (b) Yet what else can be more proper than somehow to connect heaven-earth with seasons? Watson’s rendering (cited above) is quite understandable. (c) Yet, again, heaven-earth is spatial; spring-autumn is temporal. To treat something spatial as something temporal is as inappropriate as treating color as weight, though they are connected. Thus something proper is treated as something improper—(a), (b)—and something improper is treated as something—(c).

“*I* (heaven-earth) *wei* (spring-autumn)”—this phrase has two possible meanings: to treat (regard) heaven-earth as spring-autumn, and to make spring-autumn with (by using) heaven-earth. And these two meanings coalesce. Heaven-earth is unthinkable without spring-autumn. Spring’s soft dreams, autumn’s dry colors, summery steely vigor, and wintery ravaging white are the atmosphere of heaven-earth, which make up the seasons—without mentioning either heaven or earth.

Thus we make spring-autumn with heaven-earth, resulting in treating heaven-earth as spring-autumn; we make spring-autumn with heaven-earth because we always treat heaven-earth as spring-autumn. Here space (heaven-earth) and time (spring-autumn) are an Einsteinian continuum, the “one world” in which things move and have their being, and are themselves complexes of time-space. Things are seasonal; palpable things. The world is seasonal or nothing, in which seasons are, making the world of heaven-earth-spring-autumn.

(ii) But what does “making” seasons with heaven-earth mean? Does Chuang Tzu mean to say: (a) The skull is that nodal point where cosmic space (heaven-earth) intersects with, weaves itself into cosmic time (spring-autumn)? Or (b) the skull rejoices itself in rhythmization (if you will) of cosmic space? Or (c) the skull participates in the making of cosmic seasons without having its hands in it, doing nothing and nothing is left undone, having to do with it without having to do with it?

(iii) In sum, the phrase, “*i* (heaven-earth) *wei* (spring-autumn,)” is at once obvious and obscure, personal and cosmic, joyous and natural.

2. To all the preceding speculations someone might say, “Humbug!” He would say that the phrase must be defective, having originally been: “*i* (heaven-earth) *wei* (*x*); *i* (*y*) *wei* (spring-autumn)”—where *x* and *y* are now lost.

On the whole, he would continue: (1) the entire *Chuang Tzu* is too corrupt to be treated today; we no longer know how one thought is connected to another, and in such an argumentative book the defect is fatal. (2) Without knowing what words and phrases are authentic we cannot even begin to know what is going on. (3) What is left for us is to compare the similar texts in the *Huai Nan Tzu* which is closer to *Chuang Tzu*’s period than Kuo Hsiang (whose text of the *Chuang Tzu* is the earliest one we have), and amend the *Chuang Tzu* with the *Huai Nan Tzu*. For instance, if the latter has *a-b-c* and the former has *a-c*, then one can amend *b* into the former.

My responses are as follows: To (3): The *b* may also be a later addition, whether *Huai Nan Tzu*’s or someone else’s; and no amount of formal or textual critical effort can banish this doubt. To (2): The corrupted text is not totally unintelligible. It conveys rather well the flavor and thrust of *Chuang Tzu*’s style as different from that of Confucius and Mencius.

To (1): Behind the quest for textual purity and authenticity is an assumption that the difference between the presumed genuine text and the false one is crucial for understanding *Chuang Tzu*. But one of the peculiarities of the *Chuang Tzu*—judging from my response to 2—is that in *Chuang Tzu* this is not so; for *Chuang Tzu* promoted differences. Textual differences may enhance, rather than diminish the provocative character of *Chuang Tzu*’s intentions and utterances.

There is, however, a right mode of provocation and a wrong one. My standard is that wrong provocation is one that is less flexible and less profound in implication. The Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters (especially Chapters Twenty-Eight through Thirty-One) produce *Chuang Tzu*, but mixed with an inflexible life-denying vituperation, especially against Confucius and against orthodoxies. There is a lack of double-edged subtlety, a lack of free montage-like shimmering of implications.

Our critic’s other assumption is his belief in textual-critical methods. But the rambling unintelligibility of A. C. Graham’s “restored” text (especially that of the third chapter, as we shall see) amply testifies to the limits of textual criticism. The criticism is effective only for the removal of spurious portions of text, not for positive reconstruction of the lost text. Its proper function is to remove, not to add.

And perhaps even removal should not be done without caution. Differ-

ence in diction and style may not be a sign of later addition, for the author does not promise us the same diction and style throughout. Textual criticism may cut too much. The paradoxical character of the text may not be a sign of textual corruption but an intended shocker to our common sense. Remove all ambiguity and paradox, and we remove the author with his text.

3. The question—“Is there any philosophical relevance to dipping into Chuang Tzu’s *text*?”—raises the fundamental issue of hermeneutics in Chinese philosophy. The imagery of our conversation with *Chuang Tzu’s* empty skull helps us understand the intricacies of the whole issue.

The fact is that we can do neither with nor without textual scholarship in our studies of the philosophy of the Chinese ancients, especially of Chuang Tzu. For, on the one hand, we must understand the ancient greats by studying the texts they left with us. Here, to neglect history is to be condemned *not* to repeat it in ourselves; we are babblingly lost in the barrenness of contemporary ignorance. We simply have to carefully study their texts to discern what they meant, or at least what they may well have meant. Understanding the philosophy of the Chinese ancients is first of all a textual exercise in the history of ideas.

On the other hand, however, in the field of Chinese philosophy (especially in Taoism and in Chuang Tzu) to know history *is* to repeat it on our own today—fully alive, always different from yesterday. To stay in Chuang Tzu scholarship alone is to be embalmed in Chuang Tzu scholasticism; it is to miss him, and thereby miss ourselves.

The authentic Chuang Tzu scholarship is then an art of handling Chuang Tzu’s dry skull, fully alive. The text is “dry” and ancient, requiring the historical scholarship of textual hermeneutics. The text is “alive,” calling us constantly as we handle it, telling us that *we* are dead, not it.

Chuang Tzu’s text is his three kinds of words—“goblet words,” “doublet words,” “lodging words” (27/1-9). First, to quote Ezekiel backward, Chuang Tzu’s dry bones and empty skull always come up to call *us* to stand alive. Such a call is Chuang Tzu’s “goblet words” which tip *toward* us to alert us back to ourselves. His words call us to come alive, not just to them but to ourselves and to the world. Strangely, one way to come alive is to become as dry as the skull [“dry wood”], which will be meditated on when we come to Chapter Two, line 6.

Secondly, as we study Chuang Tzu’s skull-text, we realize that it is radioactive with the double rays, as “doublet words,” of both ancient wisdom and contemporary judgment. His empty skull becomes ours; we have to fill it

with our brain, flesh, and blood, much as our bones are clothed in the flesh and blood of daily ongoing.

And then, thirdly, we realize that we have never been more alive to the text, to ourselves, and to the world. The dry empty skull talks to us *in* us now; the talk is his “lodging words,” true Chuang Tzu scholarship. Such scholarship is a subtle art of weaving textual scholarship *under* our contemporary understanding. The etymology of “subtle” and “understanding” suggests nothing less than that our understanding should come from standing-under, under-going the text—so underwoven with the textual scholarship that we do not know whether our understanding (of the text, ourselves, the world) is ours or its, a seamless subtle whole in which the conversation with his/our skull is constantly carried on.

We thus come alive, with and within Chuang Tzu’s skull-text. First, we come alive and respond, with the help of traditional hermeneutics of the text, to Chuang Tzu’s call; so as, secondly, to come alive to ourselves and to the world; thereby, thirdly, to come back to the text for more serene evocation.

Here “objectivity” is as foreign as staying out of Chuang Tzu. For our first reading in the hermeneutic tradition arouses our curiosity. We are intrigued by ambiguous phrases, vibrant with alternative readings, some more plausible than others, some mutually contradictory. But the text is alive and calling; we cannot turn away. We probe deeper to find more alternative implications and coherence; our minds “fly off in a new direction at every re-reading” (Graham). We meditate on the text as we live on, come back to it, and find more implications. We thus move back and forth between the text and our daily living, and in the meantime we mature in our understanding of the text and of ourselves in the world. Such a round of existential conversations with Chuang Tzu’s empty skull which becomes ours *is* “Chuang Tzu scholarship” truly so called.

One such round of conversations is reported in this *Companion*; it cannot by its nature be a commentary. “And such conversation is an indescribable joy co-rhythmic with the coming and going of the seasons,” so adds Chuang Tzu’s empty skull in us.³⁶

D. The Poetic *Chuang Tzu*

1. “Just as the cosmic hymn was a perfect expression of the philosophy of Prajapati, and the memorial dialogue was a perfect expression of the philosophy of Plato, so the poetic vignette was a perfect expression of the philosophy of Chuang Tzu.” In these terms, James D. Parsons has on occasion