

ZHUANG ZI'S PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE – FROM THE ORGANIC NATURALISM PERSPECTIVE¹

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Abstract. In order to discover the being of human, we focus our efforts on language. But language has two sides. On the one hand language covers the being; on the other hand language discovers the being. Zhuang Zi used many allegories, repeated words and goblet words³ to resolve the paradox of language. Through this kind of language, we discover an organic natural being. Then we draw the conclusion that human beings need to fulfill and converge into the dynamic organic nature.

Keywords: Zhuang Zi, language, being, saying, nature

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³ It is not an easy task to translate “Goblet words” (“卮言”) into English. Literally, “卮” means a kind of ancient Chinese container for wine (thus, goblet); while “言”means words, therefore – “goblet words”; precisely this form was used by Lin Yutang (1895-1976), a famous Chinese scholar. In Zhuangzi, “卮言” (goblet words) are a kind of words which come forth naturally without any intention, without any bias. Generally, goblet words comply with endless changes and harmonize all by the Heavenly Equality. It is also argued that goblet words (for instance, see W.W. Chiu, [2015]) are the logical forms that defy the act of fixing a definite answer in any conceptual distinction or disputation; but may include dilemmatic questions, oxymora and double denial (all serving to preserve indeterminacy); and thus encouraging readers to be more open-minded towards distinctions of the real world.

ФИЛОСОФИЯ ЯЗЫКА ЧЖУАН-ЦЗЫ – ИСХОДЯ ИЗ ОРГАНИЧЕСКОЙ НАТУРАЛИСТСКОЙ ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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Резюме. Для того чтобы раскрыть существование человека, мы можем сосредоточить наши усилия на языке. Но язык имеет две стороны. С одной стороны, язык охватывает существование; с другой стороны, язык раскрывает существование. Чжуан Цзы использовал множество аллегорий, повторяющихся слов и кубковых слова⁴, для разрешения парадоксов языка. Однако, через подобные разновидности языка – мы обнаруживаем органическое природное существование. Тогда мы делаем вывод, что люди должны осуществлять нужные практики и приближаться к динамической органической природе нашего мира.

Ключевые слова: Чжуан Цзы, язык, существование, пословица, природа

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Заключение

⁴ «Кубковые слова» («卮 言») трудно переводятся на европейские языки. Буквально «卮» означает своего рода древний китайский контейнер для вина (кубок); тогда как «言» означает слова, поэтому – «слова кубка»; именно эту форму выражения использовал Лин Ютанг (1895–1976, известный китайский ученый). В Чжуан Цзы «卮 言» (слова кубка) – это своего рода слова, которые произносятся естественным образом без каких-либо намерений, и без каких-либо предвзятости. Как правило, кубковые слова соответствуют бесконечным изменениям и гармонизируют все по Небесному Равенству. Также утверждается, что слова кубка [см., например, W.W. Chiu, 2015] – эти выражения являются логическими формами, которые бросают вызов акту фиксирования определенного ответа в любом концептуальном разграничении или диспутах; но могут включать вопросы дилеммы, оксюморона и двойного отрицания (все это служит для сохранения неопределенности); тем самым подталкивая читателей к позиции большей открытости к различиям в реальном мире.

Introduction

What is the being of human? This is a question puzzling many philosophers. Aristotle said that human is a kind of rational animal. We want to ask the question further. Why human is rational? In our opinion the reason lies in the language. The point is not only that human can use language to express the thinking, but also that human cannot have a rational thinking without language. Although Aristotle has not directly put forward that Language is the precondition for rationality. He threw light to us. Aristotle noticed that “spoken sounds are symbols of affections in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds.” [Aristotle, 1984, p.25] That means language can realize symbols of the internal experience. And just by the combination and separation of symbols we can know the world either truly or falsely. “For falsity and truth have to do with combination and separation.” [Aristotle, 1984, p.25] For Aristotle, if we combine the symbols in a logical way, then we can get the truth of the world. “We must look for the attributes and the subjects of both our terms, and we must supply ourselves with as many of these as possible, and consider them by means of the three terms, refuting statements in one way, establishing them in another, in the pursuit of truth starting from an arrangement of the terms in accordance with truth.” [Aristotle, 1984, p.73] As human can know the world logically, human is rational animal and different from other animals. Other animals only experience the world and cannot know the world logically because they do not have any combination and separation of symbols. It is the relationship of symbols that make human as rational animal. So we think that human is a kind of rational animal with language. In order to discover the being of human, it is better to seek in the language world.

1. Language and the being of human

Here we refer Language to its broad meaning. It includes not only the linguistic communication, but also all kinds of symbol such as verbal symbol, graphic symbol, data symbol and imperceptible symbol. Just in the broad sense, human is surrounded by the net of language. Unlike the other animals only live in the physical world, human dose not simply adapt to the physical world. “No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. They are the varied threads which weave the symbolic net, the tangled web of human experience. All human progress in thought and experience refines upon and strengthens this net.” [Cassirer, 1944, p.25] That is, human lives in the world of language. And language is universal. So Aristotle based our understanding on the language. “Nor can one understand through perception.” [Aristotle, 1984, p.144] Because understanding is universal but perception is particular, “for one necessarily perceives particulars, whereas understanding comes by becoming familiar with the universal.” [Aristotle, 1984, p.144] For Aristotle, we understand the world through demonstrations, “since demonstrations are universal.” [Aristotle, 1984, p.144] As demonstration is the logical language, we understand the world through language. Not only we have understanding through language, we become what we are through language. “In any case, language belongs to the closest neighborhood of man’s being.” [Heidegger, 2001, p.187]

2. The two sides of language

Hence, we try to discover the being of human through language. But it is still difficult. Because language has two sides. On the one hand language covers the being; on the other hand language discovers the being. More than two thousand years ago, Chinese famous philosopher Zhuang Zi noticed the double sides of language. Zhuang Zi was living at the same time as Aristotle, in China that was the Warring States Period. According to the Records of the grand historian of China, “Zhuang Zi was knowledgeable and his idea inspired by Lao Zi. There are more than 100,000 words in his book, most of them are allegories.” [Si Maqian, 1959, p.2143]

Zhuang Zi thought it was so hard to use language to describe the being, because the being Dao could never be defined. “Great Tao cannot be given a name” [Zhuang Zi, 2012, p.89–92]. Speech cannot express the absolute. So the Sage knows that Dao exists, but does not talk about it. If language was viewed as a tool for defining, then language would be a cover. Heidegger also pointed that “We can never say Being (*Ereignis*) immediately” [Heidegger, 2012, p.63]. This idea about language is a little bit of pessimism. Especially they denied the possibility of using logical language to discover the being. This is different from Aristotle. Aristotle positively confirmed the logical language. Just for this difference, Aristotle contributed to the logic, while Zhuang Zi did not play any role in the development of logic.

Fortunately, Zhuang Zi did not reject the language totally. Zhuang Zi obviously noticed the paradox that Dao cannot be defined but he had to say some words about the Dao. To resolve this paradox, we think Zhuang Zi noticed the deep relationship between language and being. That is, being is showing itself by saying and language comes from being. Therefore, we could not hold our tongue to discover the being. For Aristotle also, the world lends itself to the grasp of language. And for Heidegger, “Language is the house of Being.” [Heidegger, 1971, p.135] Although they had different opinions of the role of logical language to define being, but all of them noticed that language originated in being and being is saying. And it is interesting that in Chinese dictionary, the verb form of Dao also means saying. [Chinese Etymology Dictionary, 1983, p.3073]

The being as saying need to be listened, “as listening, catches from Saying what is to be said, and raises what it thus has caught and received into the sounding word.” [Heidegger, 1971, p.131] Who is the listener? Human being has his own destiny to listen to the saying. “We can be those listeners only in so far as we belong within Saying.” [Heidegger, 1971, p.126] We think the point is that we are attributable to being, so we have the ability to listen to being. What kind of ability do we have? For Aristotle, “Imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over, the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation.” [Aristotle, 1984, p.2318] We agree with Aristotle that the imitation is the connection between human being and being. We imitate the being. Just by imitation, human beings bring the saying of being to the sound of language.

We think it is for this reason that Zhuang Zi had to say. Zhuang Zi just listened to the saying; he imitated the saying and raised the saying of being to the sounding words as the allegories, repeated words and goblet words. As Zhuang Zi noticed,

“Now I speak some words here, do not know whether my words are different from other people’s words. Whether same or not, as we both speak, then all the words belong to the same, with no difference. Since it is so, let me speak.” [Zhuang Zi, 2007, p.90] Zhuang Zi’s words are same as other’s words, because all these words are language and all language belong to the Saying of being. But Zhuang Zi’s words are different from other people’s words. Why are Zhuang Zi’s words so special? That is, Zhuang Zi used lots of allegories. We think these allegories are the closest imitations of the saying of being.

3. The feature of Zhuang Zi’s language

In the book Zhuangzi, there are many allegories, repeated words and goblet words. “Allegories make up nine tenths of it; repeated words make up seven tenths of it; goblet words come forth day after day, harmonizing with the Heaven.”[Zhuangzi, 2007, p.836]

This kind of language does not use the concept to define Dao. Zhuang Zi believed that all concepts are limited. Zhuang Zi did not think the limited concepts could describe the unlimited Dao. For Zhuang Zi, “The preciousness of language lies in the meaning. The meaning is with Dao which cannot be conveyed by words.” [Zhuang Zi, 2011, p.145] So he used many allegories, repeated words and goblet words to imply the meaning other than describe Dao directly. As Aristotle also noticed that “Metaphors must be drawn, as has been said already, from things that are related to the original thing, and yet not obviously so related.” [Aristotle, 1984, p.2253] Zhuang Zi just tried to connect the meaning of allegories to the original being indirectly; he is very famous and special for this effort. This is also the reason for Chinese scholars studying Zhuang Zi’s philosophy of language. Many scholars think that Zhuang Zi’s words are harmonizing with the Heaven, because “they look like the language spoken by human, actually it is the things themselves that are saying, it is the nature that is saying, it is Dao that is saying, and it is also the language that is saying.”[Zhao Kuiying, p.19] And these allegories, repeated words and goblet words “as more authentic speaking of language with the power of saying, of course more closely to Dao.” [Zhong Hua, p.98] So we would like to encounter the being by listening to the saying with Zhuang Zi through these allegories, repeated words and goblet words.

4. The allegories, repeated words and goblet words are saying an organic natural being

Through the allegories, repeated words and goblet words, we listen to the saying of an organic dynamic innate nature. Some Chinese scholar also put forward, “The ethics of Daoism represented by Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi essentially is founded on the naturalism.” [Wang Zeying, 1999, p.53] Now let’s see what is included in this organic naturalism.

4.1. Dao is in the wholeness of nature

If we want to discover Dao, where could we find Dao? Zhuang Zi made up an allegory to answer this question. This allegory is about a dialogue between Dong Guozi and Zhuang Zi. Dong Guozi asked Zhuang Zi where Dao is. Zhuang Zi answered that Dao exists everywhere. Dong Guozi asked an instance of it. So Zhuang Zi said, "It is here in this ant." Dong Guozi said, "You give me a lower instance." Then, "it is in this panic grass." "You give me a more lower instance." "It is in this earthenware tile." "Why do you give me so lowest instance?" "It is in the excrement." At last Dong Guozi gave no reply. [Zhuang Zi, 2007, p.662–665]

From this allegory, we see that Zhuangzi did not view Dao as an object placing in somewhere. We cannot find Dao in some particular place. Dao is everywhere, in the ant, in the grass, in the earthenware tile, even in the excrement. All these things belong to the nature. That means we cannot separate Dao from nature.

And nature is wholeness. There is no distinction. Dong Guozi thought the excrement is lower than ant. That is because he made this distinction from his prejudice. Most of us just like Dong Guozi, we look at things with bias. But the nature is one with no distinction. "In the light of the Dao all is one." [Zhuang Zi, 2012, p.75–77]

The many kinds of things in the nature just show the manifold of nature. The diversity has no difference in value. All things are equal. The nature is one with diversity. And thank for the diversity, the things could change from one modality to another, so the nature is dynamic.

4.2. Nature is dynamic with the transformation of things

In the beginning of the book Zhuangzi there is a famous allegory. At first sight, this allegory looks so ridiculous. It is said that a really big fish in the northern ocean changed into a big bird. When this bird flied to the sky, its wings were like clouds covering the sky. This bird prepared to remove to the Southern Ocean. [Zhuang Zi, 2007, p.6–8]

How could a fish change into a bird? It is hard to think. Still Zhuangzi did not want us to know this by understanding. Just when we expand our imagination, it becomes so interesting.

Firstly, we see that everything is changing. Nature is not static. Fish is no more than a fish. Even fish could change into bird. And the change happens not at this moment that the fish become the bird. In fact, change happens in the successive moments during the life of fish.

Secondly, the transformation makes new hope for life. We can ask why the fish change into the bird? Why did not the fish change into a worm? We guess the bird as the vehicle of metaphor is very special. We can imagine that it is hard for the big fish to swim in the dark ocean. But after the fish changed into the bird, the big swing gave it a power to fly. When we imagine a flying bird, we can feel light and graceful.

Thirdly, the transformation provides us a new view to see the world. The change of the fish not only means that things are changing but also that the viewpoint is switching. In the ocean, everything can be seen distinctly, so the difference is very

clear. But look from the sky, the difference of all things disappears. This shows the view from Dao, there is no difference, no discrimination, no stubborn resistance, all changing things are united into a dynamic one whole.

4.3. Nature has the internal innate status

What is the force of the transformation? Does it come from the outside? For Zhuang Zi, it comes from Dao itself. “It has Its root and ground (of existence) in itself.”[Zhuang Zi, 2016, p.51]

Let us see another allegory. It is said that Zhuang Zhou dreamt he was a butterfly. The butterfly was flying and enjoying itself. Zhuang Zhou did not know it was him until he awoke suddenly. Then he asked whether it had formerly been Zhou’s dreaming that he was a butterfly, or it was now a butterfly’s dreaming that it was Zhou. [Zhuang Zi, 2016, p.36–39]

This is another case of transformation of things. Like the last allegory about the change of the fish, this allegory also implies that nature is dynamic with the transformation of things. The difference is that the metaphorical object is butterfly this time. Still butterfly can fly; we can feel light and graceful. Furthermore, the butterfly has transforming growth factor by its nature. The process of becoming a butterfly continues by itself. That implies the force of transformation comes from the nature itself. Zhuang Zi did not make up the same kind of allegory repeatedly. In this allegory, Zhuang Zi not only implied that the transformation of all things, but also showed that the force of transformation comes from the nature itself.

5. The existent way of human is to converge into the dynamic organic nature

Through the language of Zhuang Zi, we discover Dao as natural organic being. But Dao is not an ontology concept. “For Zhuang Zi, Dao is more related to the existent way and attitude of human.” [Wang Bo, 2004, p.157] “The state of Dao is brought from the life of subject (man).” [Chen Guying, 2008, p.393] Dao is calling us. We need to respond to the saying. Just living with the being of language to fulfill and converge into the organic nature, we human beings become who we are.

So the true man “Being such, their minds were free from all thought; their demeanour was still and unmoved; their foreheads beamed simplicity. Whatever coldness came from them was like that of autumn; whatever warmth came from them was like that of spring. Their joy and anger assimilated to what we see in the four seasons.” [Zhuang Zi, 2016, p.44–47] We see the true man has the genuine life which is to be with the dynamic nature.

When we realize this, we will not regard ourselves as the central factor in the universe. We need to regard ourselves as human from the view of the organic nature. “‘Dao is one wholeness’ manifests the picture of being, this metaphysical existent morphology at the same time conditions the relationship between the things and me.”[Yang Guorong, 2006, p.63]

Firstly, we do not discriminate things from ourselves standard. The nature is one unity with diversity. The wholeness does not mean identity. Everything has its inherent character. Still as Zhuangzi said, “Men eat animals that have been fed on

grain and grass; deer feed on the thickset grass; centipedes enjoy small snakes; owls and crows delight in mice; but does any one of the four know the right taste?"[Zhuang Zi, 2016, p.30-31] The answer implied by Zhuang Zi is that we cannot treat everything in one common standard especially from our own view. This is also very important for today. In the 20th century, philosopher Emmanuel Levinas put forward that seeking for the identity is the core reason for the violence. "The way of the I against the 'other' of the world consists in sojourning, in identifying oneself by existing here at home with oneself [chez soi]" [Levinas, 1979, p.37] It seems that men by assimilating others confirm the subjectivity. But "Subjectivity is not for itself; it is, once again, initially for another." [Levinas, 1985, p.96] As long as we respect different things in nature, human would have mature subjectivity.

Secondly, we shall accept the transformation of things. The nature is dynamic. Everything is changing. Although we know this, but it is hard for us to accept the change. That is because we still see the change from the anthropocentric view. From our own judge, we see some change is good to us and some change is bad to us. And we are happy with the good change and sad with the bad change. But we often make the wrong judge. Some change maybe seems no good, but actually is good. Some change maybe now is bad, but later is good. And the bad could change into good; good could also change into bad. We cannot always expect all change is good for us.

Actually, there is no distinction between good and bad change in nature. From the view of nature, we shall accept all change. With this acceptance, we will not be disturbed by emotion and will live in peace. "The Perfect man is spirit-like. Great lakes might be boiling about him, and he would not feel their heat; the He and the Han might be frozen up, and he would not feel the cold; the hurrying thunderbolts might split the mountains, and the wind shake the ocean, without being able to make him afraid. Being such, he mounts on the clouds of the air, rides on the sun and moon, and rambles at ease beyond the four seas." [Zhuang Zi, 2016, p.30–33]

Thirdly, we need to resonate to the nature. The nature exists in itself. Everything emerges and disappears in and from itself. Neither to resist the nature, nor to assist the nature. Just being in harmony with the Dao. How could we be with nature? Forget the aim of our own and let the things happen naturally. Thus "The sagely man does not occupy himself with worldly affairs. He does not put himself in the way of what is profitable, nor try to avoid what is hurtful." [Zhuang Zi, 2016, p.32-33] Just by following, "Human beings follow the way of earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows Dao, Dao follows its own nature", [Lao Zi, 2011, p. 66–70] human beings become who they are naturally.

Conclusion

Since language is internal to the being of human, "In order to be who we are, we human beings remain committed to and within the being of language." [Heidegger, 1971, p.134] Language lies in the saying of being. Human beings are listening to saying. So Zhuang Zi listened the saying and bring the saying of being to the sound of language such as allegories. Through Zhuang Zi's allegories, we listen to the

saying of an organic dynamic nature. We think men need to respond to the saying of being and become the true men in harmony with the organic dynamic nature.

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