Communicating Not-Knowing: Education, Daoism and Epistemological Chaos

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Abstract: Mainstream educational theory and practice tend to favour what Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, has called 'banking education', in which students are seen as depositories of knowledge. But seeing pedagogy as a matter of simply communicating knowledge misses the epistemological complexities of our relationship with the world. By means of a reading of the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, in this paper I intend to explore how the communication of *not*-knowing may be of central value in teaching and learning. Arguing that our lives are characterised by an 'epistemological chaos' in which the distinctions between knowing and not-knowing can never be firmly established, I suggest that the Daoist texts may allow teachers and students to rethink the purpose of education as a matter of *yang sheng,* or 'nourishing life, by means of developing skill in dealing with the epistemological chaos in which we are immersed. [China Media Research. 2014; 10(4): 10-19]

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Teaching is even more difficult than learning. We know that; but we rarely think about it. And why is teaching more difficult than learning? Not because the teacher must have a larger store of information, and have it always ready. Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn. The real teacher, in fact, lets nothing else be learned than learning. The teacher is ahead of his apprentices in this alone, that he has still far more to learn than they—he has to learn to let them learn. The teacher must be capable of being more teachable than his apprentices. The teacher is far less assured of his ground than those who learn are of theirs. If the relation between the teacher and the taught is genuine, therefore, there is never a place in it for the authority of the know-it-all or the authoritative sway of the official. (Heidegger, 1973, p. 15)

I have been a teacher, in one form or another, for a decade and a half, teaching students in the disciplines of philosophy and creative writing. I came across this passage from Heidegger very early on in my life as a teacher. At the time, far from assured of my own ground, I took comfort from the strange claim that teaching requires uncertainty and lack of assurance. If I was not particularly assured back then, I could at least take it as a sign that I was doing something right. Nevertheless, I also found this passage unsettling, because it suggested that this lack of assurance could only get worse as time went on.

Fifteen years on, I want to revisit this passage, using it as a starting point for rethinking the role of assurance and non-assurance, knowing and not-knowing, within the context of teaching. In some senses, I am indeed more assured than I was when I began teaching. At the very least, I am more assured in the fact of *not* being assured, more able to navigate the choppy waters where knowing meets not-knowing. But if I am more assured in one sense, in another sense, it is clear to me that my assurance has diminished over time. In the present paper I want to explore the pedagogical significance of this double movement of increased assurance in one sense, and increased lack of assurance in another.

My approach to this question will be by taking what the French philosopher Fran çois Jullien (1986; 2004) might call a *detour* through the philosophical texts of Daoism, texts that can provide rich resources for rethinking the questions of what it means to teach and what it means to learn. Stripped down to its bare bones, my argument is this: that teaching and learning are at their richest and most fruitful when they are not just concerned with communicating knowing, but when they communicate not-knowing. Thus, a rich educational context is one in which knowing and not-knowing, assurance and non-assurance swirl around each other chaotically; and teaching is as much about communicating not-knowing, tentativeness, uncertainty, flights of fancy, hypotheses, puzzles, conundrums, bafflements and confusions, as it is about communicating knowing, assurance, certainty, well-mapped paths, proofs, solutions, clarifications, illuminations and clarities.

I am going to refer to this complex swirl as 'epistemological chaos'. I am using the notion of 'epistemological chaos' partially as a provocation, but not entirely: after all, notions of 'chaos' and 'disorder' in various forms — for example the terms *huntun* 混屯, and *luan* 亂 — themselves pervade the Daoist texts (see Girardot 1978; 2009). Nevertheless, it is clear that chaos and disorder are not values that are free from ambivalence: they may be disastrous, but equally, they

may be productive. So I will not be arguing for the necessity of epistemological chaos to the exclusion of epistemological order, just as I will not be arguing for not-knowing to the exclusion of knowing. Instead, I will be arguing that without giving not-knowing and the communication of not-knowing their due, and without permitting into the classroom what I will be arguing is an *optimally productive* measure of epistemological chaos, then teaching risks becoming radically impoverished.

But why should giving epistemological chaos more space in the classroom be desirable, and how might embracing such chaos enrich teaching? The answer to these questions, I think, lies in the fact that our lives themselves are pervaded by a large degree of epistemological chaos. Teaching, as I understand it here, is not a matter of taming this chaos, but instead of developing and communicating new understandings—on the part of both teachers and students—of how to effectively *deal with* this epistemological chaos, without necessarily attempting to straighten it out and to replace it with some kind of perfect epistemological order.

This approach to pedagogy puts me at odds with certain mainstream models of teaching, and certainly it with what Freire (2000) has scathingly called the 'banking education' model. Freire (2000) writes as follows:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. (p.72)

Despite several decades of educational theory since Freire's book, this model remains the basic model underpinning day-to-day practices within universities, where teaching is a matter of 'delivering content', and where universities work with the world of business in 'knowledge transfer'. Knowledge, in such a system, is a kind of *stuff* to be heaped up, or moved hither and thither according to often blatantly economic demands. Freire's alternative to 'banking' education is a form of education based upon a thoroughgoing commitment to dialogue. Freire writes that those wishing to break with the banking model, 'must abandon the educational goal of deposit-making and replace it with the posing of the problems of human beings in their relations with the world' by means of a critical and dialogical approach to education.

And yet there is, I believe, some virtue in banking education: I am grateful for much of the knowledge that I have had deposited in me during my education. Similarly, there is also virtue in dialogue. But I become worried when a single model of education rules alone, when only one strand is plucked out of this seething sea of epistemological chaos, and is set up as *the* model or authority that *must* be followed. In this paper I am not offering a fully worked-out model of my own; instead, I am attempting to loosen the grip of some existing models by looking at the complex and subtle tides and cross-currents of our engagement with the world, as we mutually teach and learn. Rather than attempting to privilege not-knowing over knowing, or favouring only one kind of epistemological relationship, I will be arguing that, given that we are beings who are already irredeemably immersed in epistemological chaos, any form of education that seeks to be useful for human life must be broad enough to embrace this chaos.

Heidegger, Daoism and Teaching

Heidegger's thoughts on education appear in his essay *What is Called Thinking?* (*Was heisst Denken?*), which is derived from a lecture course delivered between 1951 and 1952. It is no accident that this was the course Heidegger chose to teach shortly after his post-war ban on teaching was lifted. Forbidden from teaching after the war by the de-Nazification committee, Heidegger underwent a period of depression and breakdown (Safranski, 1999), and only returned to teaching in 1951. Given this fraught context, it is also perhaps no surprise that this passage on teaching appears in the very earliest part of the course. The questions of what it meant to teach, and what it meant *not* to teach, must have pressing ones for Heidegger at the time. In the light of this context, there is perhaps something disturbing about Heidegger's essay. Heidegger's pedagogical style was always dangerously authoritative (Peterson, 2005), and this air of authority can be seen even at the point where Heidegger disavows it. Whilst there is something compelling and persuasive in this notion of developing skill in teaching as involving a *loss* in assurance, by claiming himself to be more teachable than his students, it seems that Heidegger is clearly asserting his own higher authority.

One might assume that here Heidegger—whose own connections with the traditions of Daoism are complex (Hirsch, 1970; Ma, 2005, 2006, 2009; Ma & van Brakel, 2006; May, 1996; Zhang, 2006)—is already drawing upon the traditions of Daoist thought. After all, Heidegger's relationship with the Daoist texts reaches back to well before the Second World War. Otto Pöggeler points out that already in 1930 Heidegger was referring to the *Zhuangzi*, which was available in Martin Buber's German translation, drawing during the course of a discussion on intersubjectivity upon the text's famous parable about the joy of fishes (Pöggeler, 1992). This engagement with Daoism intensified after the

Second World War ended, in the period during which Heidegger underwent the de-Nazification process. This deeper engagement with Daoism, and in particular with the *Dao De Jing*, Pöggeler writes, began not 'as a result of universal and neutral historical contemplation, but rather in a quite definite context' (Parkes, 1992, p. 51). It was also during this time Heidegger started to collaborate with the philosopher, theologian and translator Paul Hsiao Shih-yi (蕭師毅) on a translation of the *Dao De Jing* (Ma, 2006).

Writing in Parkes (1992), Hsiao gives a curious account of their collaboration, ranging between philosophy, personal and political reflection, and tales of clairvoyant ducks. In this account Hsiao talks of how he encountered Heidegger in the spring of 1946 in the Holzmarktplatz in Freiburg, finding the philosopher in what seems to have been a state of mental disarray. Hsiao quoted some lines from Mencius, which seemed to move Heidegger, who then proposed that they translate the *Dao De Jing* together. Heidegger and Hsiao worked through the summer of 1946, eventually producing a translation of only eight of the eighty-one chapters. Hsiao writes that Heidegger was relentlessly painstaking, noting dryly that, 'Presumably we would have finished in a decade or so' (Hsiao, 1992, p. 97). It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the project ground to a halt as the summer came to a close, with Hsiao admitting later to a 'slight anxiety that Heidegger's notes might perhaps go beyond what is called for in a translation' (p. 98). Hsiao's essay ends with a degree of ambivalence towards Heidegger, and with the suggestion of some relief that the project came to an end.

Despite this evidence of earlier engagement with Daoist sources, and despite what may seem to be superficial parallels between Daoist themes and tropes and the content of Heidegger's essay on teaching, there is no clear evidence of either direct or indirect influence. Explicit references to Daoist thought appear in Heidegger's published works only later in the 1950s. Whilst some commentators, for example Zhongjie Wu (2011), have pointed out an *affinity* between the passage I quoted at the opening of this essay and traditional Chinese discourses of teaching and learning (although, interestingly, in the context of Confucian rather than Daoist texts), for present purposes, rather than attempting to demonstrate whether there may be any lines of influence here, I am far more interested in the way that—whatever influence there may or may not be—the Daoist philosophical texts may be able to help with exploring more concretely the paradoxes of teaching that Heidegger raises.

First I will explore these paradoxes by looking at the relationship between knowing and not-knowing in the *Dao De Jing* of Laozi. Then I will move on to consider how the *Zhuangzi* tackles a similar set of

problems. Finally, I will conclude by proposing that the richest and most fruitful approaches to pedagogy might be those that are more messy and epistemologically chaotic than can be easily captured in the net of single educational theories, and certainly more messy and chaotic than is approved of within public discourses on the nature of teaching and learning.

Knowing and Not Knowing in the *Dao De Jing*

My focus for the remainder of this paper will be upon what in Chinese is called *zhi* 知, a term that is often translated into English as 'knowledge', but which can have a broader range of meanings, from 'consciousness' or 'awareness' to 'wisdom.' I am interested in *zhi* not only as a positive quality, not only in terms of its presence, but also negatively, in terms of its absence or its negation. I am as interested in not-knowing as I am in knowing.

Not-knowing is particularly at issue in the seventy-first chapter of the *Dao De Jing*. The opening sentence in the original Chinese reads, '知不知上；不知知病', D.C. Lau (1963) renders this line as follows: 'To know yet to think that one does not know is best; Not to know yet to think that one knows will lead to difficulty.' For all its clarity, Lau's translation perhaps introduces elements that should not be there in the original (in particular that 'yet to think'). Drawing upon a composite version of the text that differs slightly in its details (知不知尚矣；不知知病矣), Hall and Ames (2003) prefer, 'Knowing that one does not know is knowing at its best / But not knowing that one knows is suffering from a disease.' A more curious tack is taken by Hans-Georg Moeller, in his fascinating paper 'Knowledge as Addiction: A Comparative Analysis' (2007), where the negative in the second phrase finds itself doubled up, thus rendering the passage as 'To know not-knowing— / this is the highest. / To not know not-knowing / this is a blemish.' Although the move from not knowing *knowing* in the second phrase to not knowing *not*-knowing is perhaps contentious, Moeller does seem to be in agreement with Hall and Ames that the first phrase concerns not a contradiction between what one knows and what one thinks one knows, as in Lau's translation, but instead a kind of knowledge that is knowing not-knowing.

Leaving aside the doubling of negatives in Moeller's version, this may all sound rather Socratic when translated into the context of Western thought. But there are, I think, significant differences between the not-knowing that is talked about here, and the not-knowing of Socrates. The Socrates of the *Apology* is on certain ground, because his knowledge of his own not-knowing gives him both assurance and authority. He is ahead of all the others who only *think* they know when they do not. And when the Platonic dialogues are

read in the light of the *Dao De Jing*, it seems that Socrates does not push the logic of not-knowing all the way to its conclusion. The question that nobody asks of Socrates is this: how do you *know* that you don't know?

We will return to these questions in a moment; but what I want to do here is to raise another question. The Socratic framework tends to take knowledge as an unquestioned good: the issue is not with the value of knowledge, but with whether one can or cannot be really said to know. But Moeller's perspective on the *Dao De Jing* is interesting because it suggests that our concern with knowledge—which goes so far as to be an *addiction*—may itself be a serious problem. To illuminate this point further, Moeller draws upon chapter three of the *Dao De Jing*, part of which reads as follows:

是以聖人之治，虛其心，實其腹，弱其志，強其骨。常使民無知無欲。

Lau's translation is, 'Therefore in governing the people, the sage empties their minds but fills their bellies, weakens their wills but strengthens their bones. / He always keeps them innocent of knowledge and free from desire…'. Meanwhile, Moeller translates the passage, 'Therefore the ordering of the sage is such: / He empties their hearts; / he fills their bellies. / He weakens their wishes; / he strengthens their bones. / Persistently he makes the people have no knowledge and no desires'.

Here the differences with the Western tradition ever since Socrates are clear. To be sure, Socrates claims not to know, but he does not critique the desire to know itself. What he critiques is the false claim to know when one does not. Indeed, at the end of his rigorous questioning, he often recommends his interlocutors should keep on seeking knowledge. Similarly, absence of knowledge in Aristotle, if it is a deficiency, can nevertheless be a *noble* deficiency: the nobility lies in the way that absence of knowledge translates into a thirst to know, and in the way this thirst to know translates into knowledge. Moeller writes that for Aristotle, 'The human strive for knowledge serves to distinguish this species from animals that do not, at least apparently, have such a desire. Aristotle praises the intellectual curiosity that was, for him, so significant for being human'. The source for this, of course, is the famous opening of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 980a, where the philosopher writes, 'All men by nature desire to know' (McKeon, 2001, p. 689). This desire to know is the wonder (*thaumazein* θαυμάζειν) that is said to lie at the root of philosophy. Wonder, curiosity and the thirst for knowledge are positive values, precisely because they contribute to *more* and *better* knowledge.

Laozi takes a different tack, raising more fundamental questions about the value of this hunger to know and about the virtue of heaping up knowledge: the parallels between the appetite for food, and the appetite for knowing are striking. Moeller (2007) takes the example of our mass-media consumption in which we find ourselves caught up by multiple ongoing stories and narratives, so desperate to know what happens next that we are caught in a 'hamster's wheel' in which 'the movement of information is entirely ours—but it does not get us anywhere. Knowledge becomes all-pervasive and meaningless at the same time' (p. 9). The desire to know is not an unquestionable good.

In this light, the nobility of the Aristotelian call to wonder begins to look rather more questionable. It becomes apparent that whilst there may be a value in knowing, there is also a value in *not*-knowing, in breaking this cycle of hunger for the accumulation of knowledge. Much of the knowledge we accumulate does not conduce to our nourishment. As the singer Tom Waits once put it, there is a wisdom in recognising—when faced with the great and endless accumulation of information to which we are subjected—that, 'There's a lot of things in this world / You're gonna have no use for.'

Returning to the passage above, the expressions *wuzhi* 無知 and *wuyu* 無欲 are examples of what Hall and Ames, in their introduction to their philosophical reading of the *Dao De Jing* (2003), refer to as *wu*-forms, in that they make use of the negating particle *wu* 無 ('there is not'). Alongside these two *wu*-forms, there also appear *wuming* 無名 or *wu*-naming, *wuxin* 無心 or *wu*-'heart and mind' and, most famously of all, *wuwei* 無為 or *wu*-action. Hall and Ames (2003) read these *wu*-forms not as abstractions or metaphysical concepts, but instead as what they call 'optimum dispositions of the Daoist self' (p. 44). Thus when it comes to the *wu*-form that concerns us here—*wuzhi* 無知 (not-knowing, or lacking-knowledge)—Hall and Ames gloss the term as 'a sort of knowing without resort to rules or principles' or, more briefly, an *unprincipled* knowing. This unprincipled knowing, they write, is a knowledge that is 'the acceptance of the world on its own terms without recourse to rules of discrimination'.

Whilst this reading of the term does give a sense of the positive valence of *wuzhi* in Daoist thought, at the same time it feels to me as if it risks turning *wuzhi* into another form of *zhi*, making not-knowing simply another kind of knowing. If one reads the *Dao De Jing* in the light of Moeller's concern with the addiction to knowledge, it is hard not to suspect that Hall and Ames are themselves (as are most scholars) too much subject to this addiction to really recognise the value of not-knowing.

There are several strategies that Western scholars have taken when encountering this *wuzhi*. Some

scholars, like Hall and Ames, seek to turn this not-knowing into a kind of knowing. The more mystically-inclined might follow Louis Komjathy (2013), who glosses *wuzhi* as a kind of knowing rooted in 'meditative praxis and the resulting mystical experiences and spiritual insights' (p. 112). Whilst this may be true of later Daoism, it seems to me that to read the term like this in the context of the *Dao De Jing* is unwarranted. Others have taken the emphasis *wuzhi* as a sign of the thoroughgoing scepticism of the Daoist texts. Thus Hansen writes that we can treat the 'central doctrine' of the *Dao De Jing* not as 'mystical metaphysics but as linguistic skepticism' (2003, pp.222-223). Hansen sees the text as a thoroughgoing attempt to reverse conventional judgements, not to promote opposing judgements, but to help us realise, 'that we can never take any fixed discourse as a guide in all circumstances' (ibid.).

My own approach, instead of either privileging any kind of knowing too strongly, or becoming too strongly focussed on the notion of not-knowing, is to explore how it might be possible to think through the question of what it means to know or understand and what it means to pass on this knowledge or understanding, without giving significantly greater weight to either knowing *or* unknowing. And here I suspect that Steve Coutinho's (2013) notion of 'optimal minimising' may be useful. Coutinho (2013) writes that the semantic function of *wu* in the Laozi is, 'to optimally minimise the clarity and determinacy of the concept it modifies' (p. 58). In this sense, the *Dao De Jing*'s references to *wuzhi* or not-knowing imply neither a different kind of knowledge, nor a form of scepticism; instead they recommend that in relation to knowledge we have 'a minimal amount necessary to cooperate symbiotically with our environments' (ibid.).

Whilst it is true that the question of the precise point at which knowledge can be said to be optimally minimised is very hard to judge, at least for non-sages (and most of us are, alas, non-sages), nevertheless the notion of optimally minimised knowledge can serve two purposes. Firstly, it can act for the non-sagely as a reminder there is something non-optimal in the storing-up of great quantities of knowledge like grain in a grain-store. It can remind us that when it comes to the broad field of our epistemological relationships with the world, we might do well to take both knowing and not-knowing seriously, to still our addiction to the accumulation of knowledge, and to ask: what *is* optimal here? And secondly, it can serve to remind us that this broad epistemological field is far fuzzier and harder to define than we often think. Often it is not that we know or we don't know, but instead—as Brook Ziporyn (2013) has pointed out—that we 'sort-of' know. Sort-of knowing is a swirling dance in which knowing and not-knowing cannot always be distinguished. The kind

of pedagogy I am interested in, and the kind that I think is most fruitful, is the kind of pedagogy that takes this *sort-of* knowing seriously. But this notion of sort-of knowing leads us away from the *Dao De Jing*, and towards the epistemological chaos of the *Zhuangzi*.

Knowing and Not-knowing in the *Zhuangzi*

Knowing and not-knowing are, if anything, even more at issue in the *Zhuangzi* than they are in the *Dao De Jing*. This the text repeatedly circles around questions of knowing and not-knowing, without ever settling on either not-knowing or knowing as a resting place. A large part of the *Zhuangzi*'s value and fascination, I would suggest, lies in the fact that is a work that is embodies epistemological chaos, and thus reflects the epistemological chaos of our lives. It is a work that can give us an insight into this epistemological chaos, so that we can find ways of responding to it. In other words, the *Zhuangzi* can be seen to dramatise the epistemological chaos that is ours by virtue of being human. It wanders, free and easy, through this chaos, moving between knowing, not-knowing and sort-of knowing, without ever telling the reader where, precisely, it is going. And yet I believe it is possible, from this epistemological chaos of the text, to extract some kind of guidance about how we might respond to the broader epistemological chaos of our lives.

As a starting point, I want to consider the following debate between Nie Que (whose name literally means 'toothless') and Wang Ni, which appears in the second chapter, 'Equalizing Assessments of Things' (*Qi wu lun* 齊物論).

齧缺問乎王倪曰：「子知物之所同是乎？」曰：「吾惡乎知之！」「子知子之所不知邪？」曰：「吾惡乎知之！」「然則物無知邪？」曰：「吾惡乎知之！雖然，嘗試言之。庸詎知吾所謂知之非不知邪？庸詎知吾所謂不知之非知邪？」

In Ziporyn's translation, the debate goes as follows:

Niu Que asked Wang Ni, 'Do you know what all things agree in considering right?'
Wang Ni said, 'How could I know that?'
Niu Que said, 'Do you know that you don't know?'
Wang Ni said, 'How could I know that?'
Qiu Que said, 'Then are all beings devoid of knowledge?'
Wang Ni said, 'How could I know that? Still, let me try to say something about this. How could I know that what I call "knowing" is not really "not-knowing"? How could I know that what I call "not-knowing" is not really "knowing"?' (Ziporyn, 2009, p. 17)

The first thing to note is that it is not being maintained here that all beings lack knowledge, or that knowledge is somehow impossible. Instead, something more complex is going on. It is not that Wang Ni refutes knowledge altogether. Instead he asks: how can we know for sure what we claim to know? This is not a refutation of knowledge, but instead a kind of hesitation about knowledge claims. But there is much more at stake here than a pulling-back before making firm knowledge claims, because if we do not know whether what we call knowing is, or isn't, really *not*-knowing, then the reverse is also true, and neither do we really know whether or not what we call *not*-knowing is actually knowing. Here we move beyond Socratic not-knowing into something more epistemologically chaotic, and find that knowing and not-knowing are always bound up together in ways that we cannot fully grasp. As Ziporyn (2013) writes —

> Nonknowing, then, is a kind of union of knowing and not-knowing, of the 'human' and the 'heavenly'— or, more strictly, not a union, which might suggest an achieved synthesis, but rather an openness to the free flow of knowing and nonknowing, so that 'neither wins out' once and for all, neither is the definitive answer to the questions, 'What is this? Is it knowing or is it nonknowing?' Since every perspective knows only itself, all knowing is also nonknowing, yet nonknowing is always presented as a form of knowing, so we can never know which is which. (ppp. 119-120).

If this is right, then it suggests that our relationship to the world is *always* going to be epistemologically chaotic because we will never be able to fully disentangle those matted skeins of knowing and not-knowing. And this naturally applies, although they would hate to admit it, to even the most rigorous of philosophers. Of course, this is not to say that *sort-of* knowledge is impossible. There are ways in which we can clear away some of this disorder and chaos to create temporary pools of order. But the broader field is not something that we can straighten out. It might serve us well, then—as Wong (2005) points out in his discussion of the epistemological chaos of the *Zhuangzi*—to wean ourselves away from our obsession with always being right, even if we might hope to be, at least some of the time, sort-of right, or at least sort-of not-wrong.

This being the case, the skilful educator would be one who understands that not-knowing always accompanies knowing, and who is skilled not only in navigating this epistemological chaos, but also in leading students through it. This already puts a bit more flesh on the bones of Heidegger's claim that the teacher is always further ahead than his or her students. But if this is true, we should perhaps also ask this: *to what end*? If education is not just a matter of the accumulation of knowledge, what can it usefully do? Why become skilled in navigating epistemological chaos? One persuasive answer to this, I think, can be found in the next chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, *Yang sheng zhu* 養生主, which Ziporyn translates as 'The Primacy of Nourishing Life'. The chapter begins with the following warning.

> 吾生也有涯，而知也無涯。以有涯隨無涯，殆已。已而為知者，殆而已矣。

Ziporyn (2009) translates the passage as follows:

> The flow of my life is bound by its limits; the mind bent on knowledge, however, never is. If forced to follow something limited by no bounds, the bounded [current of life] is put in danger. And to meet this danger by enhancing knowledge even further—that merely exacerbates the danger. (p. 21)

Ziporyn points out that *sheng* refers to the *processes* of living: it is active and always underway. The *Zhuangzi* is not interested in knowledge as information that is stored in great grain-stores; instead it is interested in the embodied knowing of our everyday lives. This is not bare theory. Instead, the reminder of the boundedness of this process of living could be read as an injunction to consider how our addiction to knowledge might impede this flow. In other words, the pursuit of endless heaping-up of knowledge risks narrowing life's rich flow and impeding our ability to nourish our lives.

François Jullien (2007) writes, in his study of the concept of *yang sheng* 養生, or 'nourishing one's life' that, contrary to the Aristotelian tradition, Chinese thought 'deliberately turned away from the activity of knowing, which is endless and thus hemorrhagic in terms of energy and vitality, in order to concentrate on man's ability to use and preserve the vital potential vested in him' (p. 15). This should not, however, be taken to be an injunction to *entirely* turn away from the activity of knowing. Knowledge is important in the *Zhuangzi*, but it is important within the broader context of this nourishment of vitality. If knowing can contribute to this vital nourishment, then it is to be encouraged; but the quest for knowledge for its own sake, the addiction to knowledge, is simply a squandering of energy, for the simple reason that this quest has no end point or natural terminus. It is strange, in a Western context, to think that there might be a criterion for knowing *enough*; but it seems to me that there is such a criterion in the *Zhuangzi*, and this criterion is that of whether knowing more will conduce to *yang sheng*, to the nourishment of life.

This raises the question of what kind of knowing it is that can *support* the nourishing of life. Here I'm going to look at two different aspects of this knowing. The first is the well-worn distinction—raised by many commentators on the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*—between knowing *that* and knowing *how*, a distinction first made in this form by Gilbert Ryle in 1949 in his book *The Concept of Mind*. The second aspect is the distinction that is made in the Zhuangzi between great-knowing (*dazhi* 大知) and small-knowing (*xiaozhi* 小知).

The distinction between knowing-that and knowing-how is often made with reference to the famous passage about the cook Ding and his carving of the ox. The story, which is well-known, is that Ding—a cook or butcher—is carving an ox for the ruler Wen Hui, which he does with such consummate skill, sliding his knife between the joints and bones and ligaments, that the blade has never needed sharpening in nineteen years. After Ding describes to the ruler how he carves the ox, Wen Hui replies, 'How excellent! I have heard cook Ding's words, and attained understanding of how to nourish life!'

This a complex tale, replete with ironies and uncertainties. Can the carving of a *dead* ox be a model for thinking about the nourishing of *life*? Is there a significance in the fact that the ox is carved for the *purposes* of nourishment? And what might this story tell us about teaching? After all, does Wen Hui truly attain to understanding, or does he only *think* he does? One thing that is clear is that if this is a passage about knowledge, as D'Ambrosio (2007) argues in his paper on the *Zhuangzi* and educational communication, it is not about propositional knowledge:

> Knowing, according to the *Zhuangzi*, is not a matter of knowing what, but rather knowing how. In knowing how, one is concerned with "tracing out and mapping . . . productive patterns" which requires realizing the actual normative practices of (in this case) the system. More importantly, knowing *how* is always already according to a certain perspective at a certain time, and therefore somewhat subjective and expected to change with time or place. The *how* cannot be generalised or idealised. (p. 41).

Ryle's distinction is useful, but it would not do to press it too far. Huang (2010) points out that 'knowing how' in the *Zhuangzi* (as in the rest of life) may require a degree of 'knowing that'. Indeed, if we take practical action, it is sometimes unclear where the boundary between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that' lies: if I am baking a cake, and the oven needs to be turned to a particular temperature, is this 'knowing how' to set the temperature properly, 'knowing that' the temperature

should be such-and-such, or both of these? When it comes to our embodied, everyday knowledge, there is no clear distinction between 'knowing how' and 'knowing that'. It may even be that 'knowing that' is a particular instance, as Hansen (1981) has argued, of 'knowing how', of having the know-how that goes along with a particular linguistic and intellectual skill. What is of more interest here is not the precise delimitation of the boundary between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how', but instead the question of how knowledge may be optimally minimised. Whilst baking a cake, I might know all kinds of things *in theory* about the baking of cakes; but all of this learning is potentially a squandering of energy, and too much knowledge, or knowledge badly deployed, may even make me a bad cook. Cook Ding, too, is no doubt in possession of a lot of propositional knowledge; but it doesn't interfere with his know-how. This, I think, is the crux of the matter. There is propositional knowledge that clogs and blocks the flow of effective action; and there is propositional knowledge that supports effective action. The question for educators is this: how one can make sure 'knowing that' effectively serves or nourishes the flow of life, rather than blocking it? In other words, what might the optimally minimal level of 'knowing that' be to support, rather than clog, the broader field of 'knowing how'?

This brings me to *dazhi* or great-knowing and *xiaozhi* or small-knowing. To put this distinction in context, it will be necessary to look for a moment at what many commentators have identified as the perspectivist outlook of the *Zhuangi*. The *Zhuangzi* is extraordinarily attentive to the idea of knowledge as being rooted in specific, embodied perspectives, whether this is the knowledge possessed by great mythical birds soaring through the sky, by cicadas and fledgling doves, by fish in the stream, or by philosophers strolling by on the bank. This perspectivism is not so much a thoroughgoing relativism as it is a recognition of the locatedness and of the singularity of any knowing being. We know what we know because of where we happen to be located, and because of our own singular propensities, tendencies and constitutions. Tim Connolly (2011) points out that perspectivism is a way of knowing in the *Zhuangzi*, however this does not go quite far enough, for perspectivism in the *Zhuangzi* is ultimately the *only* way of knowing: there is no aperspectival knowledge, no view-from-nowhere. The first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, *Xiao yao you* 逍遙遊 or 'Wandering Free and Unfettered' sets up the problem of perspectival knowledge with a strange tale about the giant fish called Kun, who lives in the Northern Darkness. Ziporyn points out that the name in Chinese, *kun* 鯤, also means 'fish-egg' (or perhaps we could say, to preserve the joke, 'tiddler'). This great fish transforms into bird Peng

(鵬) and soars to the Southern Darkness. From the point of view of the hopping cicada and fledgling dove, Peng's soaring is incomprehensible, to the extent that they laugh at the bird's vast bulk. Karyn Lynne Lai (2006) writes that, 'the smallness of their prospect blinds them to the magnificence of the giant bird'. She goes on to argue:

> On the other hand, the sweeping perspective is not necessarily to be preferred. The giant bird may be large and impressive, but it cannot take flight unless the wind conditions are right. It is capable only of a broad view and is unable to discern finer details. It, too, has only a partial perspective. Zhuangzi does not demonstrate preference for either. (Lai, 2006, p. 369)

However, a perspectivist method that argued on the equivalence and equal benefit of *all* perspectives for human life would be self-undermining. It would be self-undermining because it would fail to recognise that human beings necessarily have their own particular natural capacities, tendencies and quirks. Just as much as the great bird Peng, or the leaping quail, we necessarily have our own rather limited range of perspectives, and these perspectives arise out of our being the kinds of beings that we are. We *cannot* fully assume the perspective of Peng, nor that of a cicada. If the perspectives that are open to us as human beings are mutable, they are not infinitely so. Many perspectives are closed to us. However, the perspectivism of the *Zhuangzi* does not claim that there is only *one* human perspective, and so there is room for the forming of preferences about alternative perspectives in the *Zhuangzi*, even if these preferences cannot be absolutely grounded.

The question then is this: given the kinds of perspectives that are open to us as human beings, which perspectives are preferable? And the answer if clear: those that are preferable are the perspectives that help up to make our way better in the world, allowing us a more free and easy wandering, conducing more to the nourishing of our lives. Connolly (2011) puts it like this: 'The aims of the perspectivist method Zhuangzi uses—finding worth in things, dealing with the dangers of political life, learning one's limits and capacities—might all be summed up under the heading of "getting along in the world"' (p. 502). And the perspectives that enable us to get along rather better are precisely those that could be said to arise from *dazhi* or great-knowing, rather than from *xiaozhi* or small-knowing.

Thus, generally speaking, the preferred perspectives from out those of which we are capable, are those that more broader and expansive, and less cramped and narrow. Connolly (2011) writes:

> [I]f we take 'greater knowledge' [*dazhi*] to be the pivotal notion in the text, the fundamental value in Zhuangzi's philosophy is one of breadth. All of the values mentioned seem to arise from this one: experience with multiple ways of life makes a person hesitant to succumb to narrow political ambitions, humble in the face of what he knows or does not know, and capable of finding hitherto-unknown uses for things. All of these secondary values are perhaps subject to later revaluation. But breadth itself is unique in that it is in principle beyond this sort of revision. Any subsequent attempts to devalue breadth would be self-negating, since this would involve adopting some further perspective. (p. 503)

Or, as Donald Sturgeon (forthcoming, 2015) argues, it is indeed possible to improve our epistemic situation by including a broader range of perspectives; and yet at the same time to set this as a goal may lead us astray, for the attempt to too forcefully improve our epistemic situation may risk cramping our abilities to *yang sheng*, or to attend to the natural flow of our life.

Conclusion

Having taken what is a relatively free and easy wandering course through the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, in the conclusion to this essay I want to return to the question of pedagogy and to rethink what it might mean to teach and to learn in the light of these texts.

The first thing to say is that, for all the problems with Heidegger's own pedagogy, in the light of the Daoist texts, his insight into teacherly non-assurance is worth taking seriously. There *is* a process of lessening assurance that goes with a deeper engagement with questions of knowledge and its value. The deeper one knows, the more one is open to qualifications, hesitations, exceptions and uncertainties.

The second comment I want to make here is those who teach owe it to their students to do more than just pass on information. To teach well, it is perhaps necessary to take not-knowing seriously; and to take not-knowing seriously means seeing it as more than a flaw that can be eradicated by the accumulation of further knowledge, or a spur to further inquiry. To take not-knowing seriously involves understanding that it is a *constant* component of our epistemological relationship with the world in which—whether you are a student or a teacher—you are always, as Ziporyn (2013) so elegantly puts it, 'Sort of knowing what anything is, sort of not knowing what anything is. Sort of knowing what you are doing, sort of not knowing what you are doing' (p. 125).

Thirdly, in the light of this recognition of the importance of not-knowing, to teach might be also to communicate to students in such a way as to minimise

the dangers of the addiction to knowledge. By remembering that 'knowing that' is perhaps at its most richly significant when it is put in the service of 'knowing how', students might then learn to see how they can optimally minimise knowledge in such a way that they can attend more broadly to the nourishment of their lives, avoiding the perils of epistemological sclerosis.

Fourthly, the Daoist-inspired educator might encourage students towards a greater breadth and towards broader contextualisations of their knowledge and activity. The field of knowing-how, in other words, is the broad field of nourishing the flow of life, in oneself and in others. Narrowness may close us off to unsettling uncertainties, it is true; but it also cuts off the flow of life and makes knowledge small.

Fifthly, it seems to me that the Daoist texts, in their concern with not-knowing and sort-of knowing, point to the fact that epistemological chaos is inescapable; and anybody who is sets themselves up as a teacher by pretending that this chaos does not exist or does not matter will not be able to truly attend to the matter of teaching. When it comes to the business of nourishing the flow of life in the classroom, to deny this epistemological chaos is, to paraphrase Freire, to fail to really pose the problems of human beings in their relations with the world.

Finally, given that this is a paper written for a scholarly journal, I should say there is something paradoxical about trying to argue in a sober and epistemologically tidy fashion for the value of epistemological chaos. Scholarly journals are locales of epistemological order in a wider sea of swirling epistemological chaos; but this should not blind us to the fact that in the world outside, the swirl goes on.

So let me end with a story. Some months ago, an unusually troubled student knocked on my door. He was fiercely intelligent, decidedly wayward, hopeless at following directives, usually most noticeable in class only by his absence. I invited him into my office. He sat down. 'I hate this,' he said, without much introduction. 'All of it. I hate it.'

'Why?' I asked.

'Because every day people stand in front of me and tell me stuff that they claim to know, but they don't really know at all. And it depresses the hell out of me.'

I shrugged. 'Why have you come to talk to me?' I asked.

'Because in your last lecture you admitted that you don't really know that much at all.'

'Is that a problem?' I asked him. 'Me not knowing much?'

He thought for a few moments. 'No,' he said finally. 'It is a relief.'

And then miraculously—somewhere between knowing, not-knowing and sort-of-knowing—a space for teaching and for learning began to open up.

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