Classical Daoism – Is There Really Such a Thing?

Part 4.4 *Wuwei* 無為 – "Less is More"

道家無為，又曰無不為，其實易行，其辭難知。其術以虛無為本，以因循為用。無成埶，無常形，故能究萬物之情。不為物先，不為物后，故能為萬物主。

The *Daojia* (propose that one can) do nothing (*wuwei* 無為), but they also say that nothing is left undone. The substance (of their teachings) is easy to put into practice, but their words are difficult to understand. Their techniques take emptiness and nothingness as the foundation and adaptation and compliance as the application. They have no fixed tendencies, no constant models, and so are able to ascertain the essentials of all living things. (Characterized as) neither proactive nor reactive, they are able to become the masters of all living things.[1]

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[1] Modified trans. by Harold Roth and Sarah Queen in "A Syncretist Perspective on the Six Schools" in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Volume I, Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 281. "Neither proactive nor reactive" 不為物先，不為物后, is an ambiguous line that I have retranslated, which Roth and Queen rendered "Because they neither anticipate things nor linger over them." Burton Watson translated this as "It [i.e., the Daoist school] does not put material things first, nor does it put them last" ("The Biography of Ssu-ma Tan" in *Ssu-Ma Ch'ien, Grand Historian of China*, Columbia University Press, 1958, p. 47). I dare to presume that Roth and Queen equate the first four characters as a variant of the *Huainanzi* 1's 不先物為, which they translate as "not anticipate the activity of things" (*The Huainanzi*, Columbia University Press, 2010, p. 59). I think this is justified, and has influenced my interpretation. This passage is quoted in *Hanshu* 漢書 62: Sima Qian's

With these words, Sima Tan 司馬談 identified *Wuwei* 無為, "do nothing," with what he labeled *Daojia* 道家, the "*Dao*-specialists" or "Daoists."[2] In a brief comment on Laozi in *Shiji* 63, placed after the biographies of Laozi, Zhuangzi, Shenzi and Hanfeizi, he wrote "The *dao* which Laozi esteemed (was epitomized by) Emptiness and Nothingness, adapting and responding to changes without doing anything (*wuwei* 無為). Therefore, his writings on these subtle issues are difficult to understand" (老子所貴道，虛無，因應變化於無為，故著書辭稱微妙難識。).[3] But Sima Tan also said that *Daojia*

與時遷移，應物變化，
立俗施事，無所不宜，
指約而易操，
事少而功多。

> Shift (their policies) in accordance with the four seasons and respond to the transformations of things. In establishing customs and promulgating policies, they do nothing unsuitable. Their tenets are concise and easy to grasp; their policies are few but their achievements are many.[4]

In Sima Tan's view, *wuwei* – "doing nothing" – does not preclude undertaking affairs (*shi* 事, "policies") or responding (*ying* 應) to the changing environment. And it certainly doesn't preclude having a positive influence on the people or having achievements (*gong* 功). The end of *Shiji* 63 sums up Laozi's teachings with an "abbreviated quote" from chapter 57[5] of the *Laozi*: "Li Er (taught that one could) do nothing, (and the people will) transform of themselves; be clear and still, (and the people will) become correct of themselves" (李耳無為自化，清靜自正). Here, the idea is closer to a literal interpretation, for the people[6] are said to transform and become correct *by themselves*, rather than by the sage or ruler, who, although clearly having an influence, remains still and does virtually nothing.

Biography 《司馬遷傳》, abbreviated to 不為物先後. Similarly, the *Guanzi*'s *Xinshu, Shang* 《管子・心術上》 has "Do not move before things/events (do)," that is, "Do not be proactive" (毋先物動).

[2] *Shiji* 史記 130.

[3] *Shiji* 63.

[4] Roth and Queen in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, p. 279.

[5] Throughout its history, the *Laozi* or *Daodejing* has been arranged in various ways. Chapter numbers here are adopted from the received version of the text.

[6] Or, just "things/events" in general.

Wuwei 無為, whose Old Chinese pronunciation is thought to be **mawai*,[7] or **ma*-ɢʷ*aj*,[8] is composed of the negative verb *wu* 無 (sometimes written as 亾 or 无 in the early manuscripts),[9] meaning "there is no, not have, without, to lack, ("non–, in–, or –less)" or sometimes denoting the prohibitive "do not, refrain from," and *wei* 為 (or 爲), whose range of meaning runs from "to do/act, to manage or govern; to make; to serve or act as; to become, to be.[10] Steve Coutinho argues – rightly I would say – that *wu* in the "Daoist texts" usually denotes "minimizing," rather than involving a complete lack or elimination.[11] Additionally, with an Old Chinese pronunciation of **waih*,[12] 為 also represented the cognate word meaning "for the sake of, on behalf of, for the purpose of." Sometimes these two meanings were combined to signify "action done for the sake of someone/something," and also "purposive, intentional or deliberate action," which is similar to how the Mohist *Canons* 墨子經上

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[7] Axel Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2007, p. 518 and 510.

[8] William Baxter and Laurent Sagart, *Old Chinese: A New Reconstruction*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 365 and 364. Baxter and Sagart actually spell 為 as ɢʷ(r)aj, but I have simplified it by removing the "(r)" as they allow (p. 379-80 n7). Schuessler's "Minimal Old Chinese" is based on an older transcription of Baxter's (see p. 121 of Schuessler).

[9] 亾為 appears predominantly in the Guodian proto-*Laozi* manuscripts A and B and 无為 in the Mawangdui manuscripts. William Baxter does *not* believe that the presence of 亾 "*wang*" in the Guodian version signals that it was pronounced "*wangwei*" (**maŋ-wai*), (personal communication 2005), but Mathias Richter is not so sure (*The Embodied Text: Establishing Textual Identity in Early Chinese Manuscripts*, Brill, 2013, pp. 73-77). The issue is whether 亾 was polyphonous or not. See Haeree Park's *The Writing System of Scribe Zhou: Evidence from Late Pre-Imperial Manuscripts and Inscriptions*, De Gruyter, 2016, p. 192. The ancient dictionary/thesaurus *Erya* 爾雅 gives *mi* 靡 and *wang* 罔 as glosses of *wu* 無, both of which were archaic words for "not have, there is no" (Schuessler p. 382 & 507). In the late-Han *Shuowen Jiezi* 說文解字, *wu* is written as 橆, and said to use the 橆 (無) as a phonetic and the enclosed element 亾 to indicate meaning, which, in addition to meaning "to lose, disappear, extinguish," could also mean "to lack" or "not have." The early graphs for both 無 and 為 looked nothing like these modern graphs. The former originally *seems* to depict a dancer with tassels – a graph borrowed because the phonetic content of the graph was homophonous to the negative "not have," and the latter: a human hand and an elephant, (the *Shuowen* mistakenly identifies it as a monkey). These components of 為 were *possibly* chosen to signify the "crushing," taming, controlling or leading of elephants *to do* work, but the juxtaposition of hand and elephant could point to a great number of meanings. The elephant component could be a phonetic signifier *only*.

[10] The *Erya* glosses *wei* 為 as *zuo* 作 and *zao* 造, both of which meant "to do, to make, to initiate." *Zhi* 治 "to manage, govern, bring to order" has long been a synonym for *wei* 為; for example, *zhiguo* 治國 and *weiguo* 為國 are interchangeable expressions meaning "govern a state." See *Laozi* chapter 3, discussed later in this essay.

[11] Coutinho writes: "In practical application in the *Laozi*, the term '*wu*' often takes an object such as knowledge, action, or desire … [and] rather than simply negating these concepts to get their contradictories ("ignorance," "inactivity," "desirelessness") or negating a sentence to get its denial ("there is no knowledge"), it has a distinctively Daoist function of *optimal* minimizing … This is not unrestricted lessening, but presupposes a specific kind of function: a minimal amount necessary to cooperate symbiotically with our environments." (*An Introduction to Daoist Philosophies*, Columbia University Press, 2014, p. 58, italics in original).

[12] According to Schuessler. Baxter and Sagart reconstruct this as *ɢʷaj-s (Baxter-Sagart Old Chinese reconstruction, version 1.1, 2014, p. 117).

appear to define it: 志行，為也 — "intentional conduct is *wei*," or "willful action is *wei*."[13] Examples may be Mengzi's 孟子 portrayal of Yang Zhu 楊朱: "Mr. Yang acted for his own sake" (楊氏為我) and the *Guanzi*'s 管子 "purposely doing good is not (true) goodness" (為善者，非善也).[14] However, this was not always the case, as the phrase "(only) for the sake of the law (would he) do it" (為法為之) from *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 19 demonstrates.[15] This is vital to keep in mind, for there are many instances where the sense of purpose, deliberateness or intention should not be emphasized or foregrounded when we encounter the word *wei* 為.[16] In chapter 23 of the *Zhuangzi*, *wei* is described simply as the "expression of our nature" (性之動). In truth, *wei* is more of a placeholder for any number of types of action – deliberate action being but one – whose meaning must be determined by the context.[17] Unfortunately, the context is often indeterminable in the *Laozi*.

In the original teaching settings, an esoteric teaching of *wuwei* would be explained and put into contexts that would remove the ambiguities that would obtain once it had been written down on bamboo and transmitted to relative outsiders.[18] Even within a tradition, we should expect *wuwei* to be reinterpreted and applied to new situations and contexts. Inasmuch as each of the texts under

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[13] This sense is similar to the use of *wei* 偽 (*ŋoih*: Schuessler, p. 222, *N-ɢʷaj-s, Baxter-Sagart, p. 83) in chapters 19, 22 and 23 of the *Xunzi* 荀子, which for him represented (positively evaluated) deliberate human activity (e.g., chapter 22: 心慮而能為之動謂之偽), but which normally carried negative connotations, such as "artificial, false, disingenuous," (a usage also found in the *Xunzi*'s earlier chapters).

[14] *Mengzi* 孟子 3B9 and *Guanzi* 管子, *Shu Yan* 樞言. There is a difference between Yang Zhu acting for his self-interest and simple intentional or purposive action.

[15] The two 為 in this phrase would have been pronounced slightly differently, as *waih* and *wai* in Schuessler's reconstruction, as *ɢʷaj-s and ɢʷaj in Baxter-Sagart. Accordingly, I disagree with Chad Hansen and Roger Ames, the latter of which has claimed that "each lexical item carries *all* of its meanings with it on *every* occasion of its use, and the concatenation of two or more characters therefore associates *all* of the meanings of each one with the others." (*The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, Ballantine, 1998, p. 42, italics mine).

[16] Some examples in the *Laozi* itself being ch. 23: "Gusty winds do not last a whole morning, sudden downpours do not last all day. Who does this? (孰為此者): Heaven and Earth"; ch. 3: "Not valuing luxuries causes the people to not 'do thievery,' (為盜)" and *Laozi* 65 speaks of "The ancients who were adept at acting (according to the) Dao (古之善為道者)."

[17] Thanks to Manyul Im for offering up this explanation (http://warpweftandway.com/wuwei-revisited/#comment-124860).

[18] See Michael LaFargue, *Tao and Method: A Reasoned Approach to the Tao Te Ching*, SUNY Press, 1994, p. 149, 153. David Schaberg has also affirmed similar thoughts regarding the *Lunyu*: Cf. "Sell it! Sell it! Recent Translations of the *Lunyu*" in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR), Vol. 23 (Dec., 2001), p. 129 and "Confucius as Body and Text: On the Generation of Knowledge in Warring States and Han Anecdotal Literature," unpublished paper presented at the conference "Text and ritual in early China" (Princeton University, 2000), p. 6. Dirk Meyer argues that the *Laozi* was and is a "context-dependent text" that required/s a teacher or oral commentator to convey the meaning. Hence, he is very skeptical regarding retrieving the original meaning since we are not privy to those early expositors (Cf. *Philosophy on Bamboo: Text and the Production of Meaning in Early China*, Brill Publishers, 2012).

investigation contain writings composed over a significant amount of time by several different thinkers/practitioners, the meanings of terms like *wuwei* should not be *assumed* to remain consistent even within a single text. Ralph Sawyer acknowledges the polysemous nature of *wuwei* in the *Laozi*:

> Throughout the *Daodejing*, *wuwei* clearly encompasses a range of meanings: sometimes it is identical to not acting at all; sometimes it functions as a relative indicator with circumscribed referents, in aggregate connoting not taking violent or unnatural action, not initiating action contrary to Dao, and similarly constrained, if not contorted, understandings. [Tang Dynasty commentator] Wang Zhen [王真] frequently comprehends it as not undertaking forceful, disharmonious actions that result in misery and harm, particularly unnecessary military endeavors.[19]

Although most books and essays dealing with *wuwei* stress that the term does not denote doing nothing or idleness, I submit that "doing nothing" most certainly plays a part in interpreting this term properly. As we saw in the previous essay "Quietism, Mysticism and Self-Cultivation," the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Huainanzi* and *Guanzi*'s "*Xinshu*" texts all stressed inner calm and stillness (e.g., *jing* 靜). *Wuwei* is the behavioural correlate to the inner calm and stillness these texts advance,[20] suggesting a way of living consisting of less action and less interference, especially deliberate, purposive action contrived to impose and effect changes in the world. This would seem to have been offered as a corrective, targeting overactive and ambitious governments and perhaps individuals. Some actions and endeavours are still undertaken, but they done in a manner that is adaptive (*yin* 因) to the circumstances and almost instinctively or reflexively, often without deliberation. These actions are largely minor and indirect, but are said to enjoy greater efficacy than the alternatives, (just as perception and understanding are claimed to be heightened in one with inner calm). Being adaptive to the circumstances, what actions *are* done meet little resistance. As a result, there is less that requires doing.

This essay will examine many sayings and passages which contain the term *wuwei* and try to elucidate what it means. In doing this, I will be committing what Edward Slingerland has called "concordance-fixation," which he deems inappropriate because he understands *wuwei* to be but one term in "a whole set of families of conceptual metaphors that convey a sense of effortlessness and unself-consciousness."[21] However, the fact that he says that this important spiritual ideal is "severely obscured"

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[19] *The Tao of War: The Martial Tao Te Ching*, Westview Press, 2003, p. 80-1. Originally published in 1999 as *The Tao of Peace*.

[20] The Han period work *Wenzi* 文子, chapter 5 (道德) says: "*wuwei* is abiding in stillness" (無為者，守靜也).

[21] *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 11.

when we focus on the term *wuwei* should make us suspicious.[22] Perhaps, as Chris Fraser has suggested, this spiritual ideal of effortless, perfected action existed but "*wuwei*" is not the best name for it.[23] Slingerland wants to promote a spiritual ideal of perfected action that he finds in early "mainstream" Chinese texts. He admits to using the term *wuwei anachronistically* as a label for this ideal,[24] but goes on to argue that the majority of early writers who actually used the term (as an ideal mode of operating in the *political* realm) were *not* using it in its *more fundamental* sense as a spiritual ideal.[25] This situation gets even more confusing when he attempts to describe this supposedly original and fundamental sense of *wuwei* with example after example which do not contain the term *wuwei* at all.[26] How convincing can an argument be when the original and true meaning of a term can only be found in passages which do not contain it, and those passages which do actually use the term denote a concept "completely divorced" from the original, true meaning? I will take the cautious approach, sticking to how early texts *actually* use the term *wuwei* and to how a few of them attempt to explain it.

With an apparent recommendation to 'do nothing," it would be prudent to discuss some hermeneutical issues that pertain to passages in the texts, especially the *Laozi*. Michael LaFargue has gone to great lengths to explain the nature of aphoristic, "corrective" wisdom found in texts like the *Laozi*:

> Aphorisms are essentially compensatory wisdom. They are always directed against some opposing human tendency, which they mean to correct or compensate for. 'Slow and steady wins the race' is a common proverb although it is not reliable as a general law about who wins races. 'The race usually goes to the swift' is more true, but is not a proverb. Why? People have a tendency to assume that being swift is *always the only way* to win races, and 'Slow and steady wins the race' compensates for this tendency, to wake

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[22] Ibid. p. 12.

[23] "On *Wu-wei* as a Unifying Metaphor," Feature Review of *Effortless Action* in *Philosophy East and West* 57.1, 2007, p. 100.

[24] "Effortless Action: The Chinese Spiritual Ideal of *Wu-wei*" in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68.2, 2000, p. 295-6. Slingerland says he prefers to use the term *wuwei* to refer to perfected, effortless action because it is "the technical term the Chinese themselves eventually chose to denote the ideal of perfected action." Even if "the Chinese" did eventually choose to use *wuwei* to refer to effortless action, this is weak justification to use it anachronistically for Warring States texts that use the term differently. Many Chinese terms and words evolved or changed in meaning over time.

[25] Ibid. p. 297.

[26] Similarly, Rui Zhu, in his "*Wu-Wei*: *Lao-zi*, *Zhuang-zi* and the Aesthetic Judgement" (*Asian Philosophy* 12.1, 2002) contrasts the *Laozi*'s use of *Wuwei* with the *Zhuangzi*'s conception of it but contains not a single passage from the *Zhuangzi* which contains the term, even though there are many.

> people up to a different possibility. This is the 'point.' But there is no tendency to think that fast people will not win.[27]

Aphorisms, LaFargue tells us, are context-bound and are never meant to be taken as dogma:

> 'The five colors make people's eyes go blind' [*Laozi* 12] does not state dogmatically that colourful things always dull one's senses and therefore should always be avoided. It means to warn one about colourful objects *when and insofar* as they dull the sense. The images offered by an aphorism are often *counter*-images, intended to correct some human tendency (the saying's 'target'), and for this reason images offered often (like the one about colors above) are deliberately exaggerated, paradoxical, provocative, 'shocking.' This is particularly true of Laoist sayings, known for their colorfulness. Their intent is not to present a sober, accurate, properly qualified general truth, but to 'wake people up' to a perspective on the situation that they are ignoring.[28]

An excellent example that LaFargue uses comes from chapter 56 of the *Laozi*: "One who speaks does not understand." He is no doubt correct in arguing that we should not give this saying unlimited scope and "take this to mean that literally anyone who ever says anything must lack understanding."[29] We will see this applies to chapters discussing *wuwei* as well, such as chapter 64's "Those who act, ruin things" (*weizhe baizhi* 為者敗之).

The *Laozi*

Sima Tan's "the *Daojia* (propose that one can) do nothing (*wuwei* 無為), but they also say that nothing is left undone" (道家無為，又曰無不為) ultimately derives from *Laozi*'s chapter 48 (in all versions) and chapter 37 (in all but the oldest versions[30]). Chapter 37 reads:

道常無為而無不為。
侯王若能守之，萬物將自化。
化而欲作，吾將鎮之以無名之樸。
無名之樸，夫亦將無欲。

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[27] *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching*, SUNY, 1992, p. 201.

[28] Ibid., p. 202-3.

[29] Ibid., p. 204.

[30] I.e. not in Guodian 郭店, Mawangdui 馬王堆 and Beida 北大 texts. A few versions or quotations of *Laozi* 38 also contain 無為而無不為 (e.g., *Hanfeizi* 20, Fuyi *Laozi*, *Laozi Zhigui*) as well as the Fuyi *Laozi*'s version of *Laozi* 3.

不欲以靜，天下將自定。[31]

The Dao never does anything, yet there is nothing not done.
If state rulers were able to abide by this, the myriad things would evolve of themselves.
(But) in evolving, should desires arise, I would restrain them with the simplicity of the Nameless.
With the simplicity of the Nameless, they would in this case be desireless.
Not desirous and thereby tranquil, the world would become stable of itself.

This chapter – which is the *last* chapter of a number of the earliest versions of the *Laozi*[32] – makes the claim that the Dao can be characterized by or embodies *wuwei*. It does not act or make (*wei* 為), either deliberately or not, but this does not mean that there are things not done/made, that things do not happen. The oldest editions of this chapter do *not* have "yet there is nothing not done" (而無不為) and this appears to be a later addition.[33] But it is not an ill-fitting addition.

As found throughout the *Laozi*, modelling oneself on the Dao is proposed as the most valued and efficacious way to be. This chapter specifies rulers (*huowang* 侯王)[34] as those who are advised to abide by or preserve the Dao's way of being; (government officials, farmers, soldiers, carpenters, etc., presumably are not). If the rulers did this, the author claims, all of the myriad living things would evolve or transform of themselves (*zihua* 自化), which is taken to be desirable. While it's not clear that the author means to make the extraordinary claim that not just the rulers' subjects (*min* 民) would evolve, (as in chapter 57), but all living things (*wanwu* 萬物), the fact that this natural transformation occurs only when rulers refrain from *wei*-ing, (that is, when they practice *wuwei*), suggests that *wei* 為

[31] This is the received text. There are numerous variations between the various editions of the *Laozi*, but most are insignificant. One that perhaps isn't is the Guodian's "They would in this case know what is enough. Knowing what is enough and thereby tranquil …" (夫亦將知足，知足以靜) and the Mawangdui and Beida texts' "They would in this case not feel disgraced. Not feeling disgraced and thereby tranquil …" (夫亦將不辱。不辱以靜). (I've adopted not *feeling* disgraced from Victor Mair: *Tao Te Ching: The Classic Book of Integrity and the Way*, Bantam Books, 1990, p. 105.) All three words (i.e., 欲, 足, 辱) rhyme with 樸, making it impossible to reject any as later emendations (on phonological grounds). Furthermore, they all can make sense in context. With one rare exception, the Guodian proto-*Laozi* manuscripts A and B always write *wu* 無 as *wang* 亾.

[32] Both Mawangdui texts, the Beida text and probably Yan Zun's as well. The Mawangdui texts, however, do not mention *wuwei*, but *wuming* 无名, "nameless," instead. This is an inexplicable repetition of chapter 32's 道恆无名, which also contains a similar line: "If state rulers were able to abide by this, the myriad things would acquiesce of themselves" (侯王若能守之，萬物將自賓。). Chapter 32 is also found in the Guodian proto-*Laozi*.

[33] Guodian, Mawangdui and Beida editions do not have these 4 characters.

[34] *Houwang* 侯王 is usually separated and translated as "marquises/feudal lords and kings." In the period in question, the rulers of the various states were variously called *Hou* 侯, *Wang* 王, or *Gong* 公.

should be understood as coercive action or interference intended to bring about or impose change, (i.e., force things to be different than they are, on their own).

Also extraordinary is the claim that "there is nothing not done." *Wu buwei* 無不為 can be read in a couple of ways: for example, a) there is nothing not done, and b) (the Dao) is not inactive. The first suggests that without (the Dao or the rulers) interfering in the world, all will proceed in an optimal manner, and all that needs to be done will be done. This is a very optimistic and unfalsifiable claim. It requires faith that everything that happens in Nature will proceed *as it should* if humans don't mess with things. But are rulers being asked to have total faith in the Dao, *never* to *wei*, never to interfere with anything?

The answer appears to be no. The text seems to be claiming that the way in which the world is typically governed relies on *too much* interference and coercion. This way is inefficient, often ineffective and often rebounds, provoking resistance.[35] Better results would be realized by "knowing what is enough, knowing when to stop,"[36] by interfering and using coercion less. *Less*, but not never: for the text goes on to identify desire (*yu* 欲) as something to (deliberately) attenuate or restrain (*zhen* 鎮). "Desire" most likely refers to "ambition" here: the earnest desire to do more, achieve more and/or acquire more. The text cryptically says this can be done by "using the simplicity of the nameless" (*yi wuming zhi pu* 以無名之樸). The "nameless" is usually taken to be referring to the Dao.

The second reading suggests that the Dao is neither active nor inactive. This is also consistent with things said about the Dao elsewhere in the book. The implication for rulers still suggests a middle road between interfering and not interfering, between doing too much and too little. If *wuwei* signified a complete lack of *wei*-ing, it's difficult to imagine such a ruler being on the throne for long, whether through the charge of negligence – if things are not going well; for example, famine, thievery, violence – or falling prey to ambitious rulers of neighbouring states or powerful families within the state.[37] Thus, the claim shouldn't be understood too literally: sometimes there are things that simply "cannot not be done" (*buke buwei* 不可不為).

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[35] Holmes Welch called this the "Law of Aggression" in *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*, Revised ed., Beacon Press, 1971 (origin. 1957), p. 20.

[36] "Know when to stop (*zhizhi* 知止)" and "know what is sufficient (*zhizhu* 知足) are found in a few chapters of the *Laozi* – together in chapter 44 – and appear to be one of the more well-known tenets of the *Laozi* (or Lao Dan). This part of chapter 44 is found explicitly quoted in the *Hanfeizi*, *Huainanzi*, *Hanshi Waizhuan* and *Hanshu*.

[37] This is a point Herrlee Creel makes in "On the Origin of *Wu-wei* " in 無爲" in *What is Taoism? And Other Studies in Chinese Cultural History*, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 55 (originally published in 1965).

Another plausible interpretation of "*wuwei er wu buwei* 無為而無不為" is that Dao doesn't *do* anything "because" all of the myriad things will take care of that: it is *their* role to *wei*, not the Dao's. *Laozi* 25 says that the Dao takes "what is so of itself" or "what occurs of itself" (*ziran* 自然) as its standard. Taken as a guide for rulers, who stand atop of the social hierarchy, they personally should not do or get involved in the matters of state, leaving that role to their subordinates: ministers, officials, soldiers, labourers, etc.. The earliest evidence for this view is Shen Buhai 申不害 and Shen Dao 慎到 in the 4th century B.C.E., whom we will investigate later. If the contributors to the *Laozi* also held this view, they didn't mention it *in the text*. This interpretation of *wuwei* was also championed by some contributors to the *Zhuangzi*, *Huainanzi* and others and is often cited as a hallmark of early Huang-Lao 黃老 Daoism.[38]

How does one embody the Dao's mode of being and achieve *wuwei*? Chapter 37 does not say, but chapter 48 observes:

為學者日益，為道者日損，損之又損之，以至於無為，無為而無不為。
With those who engage in study there is a daily increase;
With those who embark on (embodying) the Dao there is a daily decrease.
Decrease and again decrease, thereby arriving at doing nothing.
They do nothing, yet there is nothing not done.

Some, like Harold Roth, Scott Cook, and Chris Fraser believe what is decreased when working to embody the Dao[39] is purpose or will, and for Roth indicates "the systematic loss of thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and eventually, the self" that occurs in an apophatic meditation practice.[40] Others, like D.C. Lau and Philip Ivanhoe, believe it is activity that is being decreased.[41] Plainly, what is increased (*yi* 益) in study is *knowledge* and in this case is usually regarded as somewhat superfluous, *academic* knowledge. What is decreased (*sun* 損) could also be this kind of knowledge, but the text doesn't say. What it does say, is that the end result of all this decreasing is *wuwei*. Not only that, but that although

[38] This view is also found in Yan Zun's 嚴遵 (c. 80 – 0 B.C.E) commentary to *Laozi* 74 in his *Laozi Zhigui* 老子指歸.

[39] Regarding "those who embark on embodying the Dao," *weidaozhe* 為道者 could also be translated as "those who 'do' our *dao*" or "those who embark on our way." While no character for "our" appears, it should be clear that not just any *dao* or way consists of this 'decreasing," but the particular one shown throughout the *Laozi*.

[40] "The *Laozi* in the Context of Early Daoist Mystical Praxis" in *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the* Laozi, Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Philip J. Ivanhoe eds., SUNY, 1999, p. 79. Cf, Scott Cook, *The Bamboo Texts of Guodian*, Vol. I, Cornell University, 2012, p. 288 and Chris Fraser in "*Wu-wei*, the Background, and Intentionality" in *Searle's Philosophy and Chinese Philosophy: Constructive Engagement*, Bo Mou ed., Brill, 2008, p. 75.

[41] D.C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, Chinese University Press, 1996, p. 69; Philip Ivanhoe, *The Daodejing of Laozi*, Hackett, 2003, p. 86.

one no longer *wei*-s, there is nothing not *wei*-ed. Readers may want to note that insisting on consistently understanding *wei* as intentional or deliberate action renders this expression very peculiar, for although it makes sense for the authors to say that the Dao (or one who embodies the Dao) does not purposely do anything, it does not make sense for them to add that, "there is nothing not done purposely" (無不為). Translators silently drop the sense of intent or purpose from the last *wei*. It may be more likely that *wei* simply refers to doing or action, and is tacitly further specified in the minds of listeners and readers. As opposed to specifying the first occurrence of *wei* as intentional/purposive action, the *wei* that the authors suggest reducing or eliminating can plausibly be specified as coercive, contentious and disruptive action, or interference/intervention. One who works to abide by the Dao would then "daily decrease" their unnecessary interference with others/the world, thereby influencing those around oneself to do the same and also showing faith/trust (*xin* 信) that things that need doing in the world will still get done. Chapter 17 of the *Laozi* says that in the ideal state the people are indifferent to the ruler – they don't love, fear, or hate him – but still all of the various "undertakings are completed successfully and work is carried out; and yet, the people assert 'we (did it) of our own accord,'" (成事遂功，而百姓曰我自然也[42]).

Returning to *wei* 為, "to do, to make" and *hua* 化, to "transform, reform, evolve," used in chapter 37, these words are related phonologically and possibly semantically.[43] Transforming the people was something that various texts proposed or endorsed in the Warring States period and was usually considered to be accomplished through education and/or the emulation of role models. The text argues that the desired transformation (or *re*formation) of the people will occur without one virtually having to do (*wei*) anything, just as there is nothing left undone in the world despite the fact that the Dao does (*wei*) nothing. In other words, the desired transformation was *often* attempted by *wei*-ing, through deliberate and/or coercive measures.[44] However, transformation also occurred automatically and

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[42] This is the Guodian text, in which it is mainly the order of the first four characters which are different. For comparison, the Wang Bi text reads: 功成事遂，百姓皆謂我自然.

[43] The pronunciation of *wei* has been reconstructed as *ɢʷ(r)aj and *hua* as qʷʰˁ<r>aj-s by William Baxter and Laurent Sagart (*Old Chinese*, p. 364 and 342 respectively), and interestingly, all examples of *hua* in excavated texts, including the *Laozi*, are written with "non-standard" graphs, with 為 serving as the phonetic component (e.g., 憩, 蟜). 化 does appear in the manuscripts, but it represents different words, such as the quasi-homophonous word, 禍, meaning "misfortune." Both 化 and 為 are "equivalent phonophorics," as demonstrated in the variant ways of writing the same words. For example, 貨 and 賕, 訛 and 譌, 挑 and 撨, 花 and 蘤. See Haeree Park's "The Shanghai Museum *Zhouyi* Manuscript and the Warring States Writing System," PhD dissertation for the University of Washington Department of Asian Languages and Literature, 2009, p. 271 and/or *The Writing System of Scribe Zhou, Evidence from Late Pre-imperial Chinese Manuscripts and Inscriptions* (5th-3rd Centuries BCE), De Gruyter, 2016. Note that 憩 is in other texts often taken to be a variant of *wei* 偽, "artificial, fake, disingenuous," and not *hua*.

[44] A line in chapter 19 of the Guodian proto-*Laozi* (A1) reads 絕憩棄詐/慮，民復季子 instead of the normal 絕仁棄義，民復孝慈. Scholars have differing interpretations of the graph 憩, but, as mentioned in the previous footnote, it surely stands

unconsciously. The authors wished to draw attention to this counterintuitive, indirect approach, and likely felt it was more effective. It goes without saying that if transformation wasn't valued, rulers would have reason *not* to follow the advice. This unforced, spontaneous transformation was called *zihua* 自化, which occurs again in chapter 57:

以正治國，以奇用兵，
以無事取天下。
吾何以知其然哉？以此。
天下多忌諱而民彌貧。
民多利器國家滋昏。
人多智而奇物滋起。
法物滋彰而盜賊多有。
故聖人云：
我無為而民自化。
我好靜而民自正。
我無事而民自富。
我欲不欲而民自樸。[45]

Use what is orthodox to order the state, use what is unorthodox in using the army,
But refrain from undertaking affairs to take the *world*.
How do we know this to be so? By this:
The world contains many prohibitions, and the people suffer ever more poverty.
The people possess many sharp implements, yet the states are increasingly benighted.
The people are abounding with knowledge, and strange things increasingly arise.

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for *hua* in some cases. Following Robert Henricks (*Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 14), this line may be urging one to "refrain from deliberate attempts to change people (憃 = 化) and plan out all the details, and the people will revert to their original, naturally filial and compassionate ways."

[45] The Chinese text is largely that of the received text, with the following emendations: 1) I have replaced the received text's "the people are very talented and clever" (人多伎巧) with the older "the people are abounding with knowledge" (人多智) found in the Guodian, Mawangdui A, Beida and Fuyi versions. (Wang Bi's commentary suggests his copy read similar, since he writes "the people are abounding with knowledge and intelligence" 民多智慧). 2) I have replaced the received text's "laws and statutes" (法令) in favour of the older "legal matters" (法物), as found in the Guodian, Mawangdui B, Beida and Heshanggong versions. 3) I have replaced the perhaps more elegant "I am lacking in desire/aspirations" (我無欲) with the "I aspire not to aspire" (我欲不欲) found in the Guodian, Mawangdui and Beida versions. While this last variation amounts to basically the same thing, the older version does not attempt to hide the fact the sages and ideal Daoist rulers do have desires and do have goals, (i.e., reducing or eliminating desires/aspirations). *Yu buyu* 欲不欲 also appears in *Laozi* 64, which will be discussed below. The Guodian text again writes *hua* 化 with an allograph looking something like 蟗, which visually indicates it's close relationship with *wei* 為, phonologically and possibly semantically.

Legal matters are increased and publicized, yet there are (still) many criminals.[46]
Therefore, the sages say:
I refrain from interfering and the people evolve of themselves.
I prefer stillness and the people become correct of themselves.
I refrain from undertaking affairs and the people become prosperous of themselves.
I aspire not to aspire and the people become simple of themselves.

The intended audience for this passage would seem again to be the ruler: one who had a state to govern and an army to use; one who may want to preside over the world and correct prevailing "policies."[47] The opening line, although it has been subject to different interpretations, seems to make straightforward sense. To render in negative terms, the suggestion, (which should probably be understood as a *hypothetical* rather than *categorical* imperative)[48], is that a ruler should not use errant, crooked or devious ways to govern, and conversely should not employ conventional and predictable tactics when forced to employ his armies.[49] Both the orthodox (*zheng* 正) and the unorthodox (*qi* 奇) have their uses.

Concern with "*taking*" (*qu* 取) the world (*Tianxia* 天下) seems questionable as representative of the *Laozi*'s worldview. Was a would-be Daoist ruler an ambitious, power-hungry dictator? "Taking the world" appears a few times in the *Laozi*, but it is readily apparent that the Daoist ruler would not forcefully and ambitiously pursue becoming the ruler of the world. Indifference and *doing less*, is in fact the means to achieve this result, while in *doing more*, one will be "unfit to take the world (不足以

[46] As mentioned in the previous note, what I have translated as "legal matters," (*fawu* 法物), is "laws and statutes" (*faling* 法令) in a number of later versions. *Fawu* 法物 has also been translated as "exquisite things," following Heshanggong's explication (i.e., 珍好之物). For example, Robert Henricks translates this line as "the more 'exemplary goods' are put on display, the more robbers and thieves there will be" (*Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching: A Translation of the Startling New Documents Found at Guodian*, p. 68).

[47] Some, like Liu Xiaogan 劉笑感, disagree, believing that "the primary agent of *wuwei* in the *Daodejing* is the sage and not the ruler or the people" ("Naturalness (*Tzu-jan*), the Core Value in Taoism: Its Ancient Meaning and Its Significance Today," from *Lao-Tzu And The Tao-Te-Ching*; Livia Kohn & Michael LaFargue eds., SUNY Press, 1998, p. 218). Cf. Liu in *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, Springer, 2015, p. 84-5. Thomas Michael asserts even more strongly that the *Laozi* addresses the would-be sage, not the ruler (*The Pristine Dao: Metaphysics in Early Daoist Discourse*, SUNY, 2005, pp. 41-6). I disagree.

[48] A hypothetical imperative is an imperative that depends on a person's desired ends, whereas a categorical one does not.

[49] Roger Ames points out that 正 and 奇 are "technical military vocabulary" (*Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation*, Ballantine, 2003, p. 218 n142), seen, for example, in *Sunzi Bingfa* 5 勢: 凡戰者，以正合，以奇勝。…奇正相生.

取天下)."[50] *Laozi* 30, for example, says that although it may sometimes be necessary to use the army, a good leader will not presume to use the army to "forcefully take" (*quqiang* 取強) more. Using the army in an aggressive way will have serious repercussions and is sure to rebound (*huan* 還). In a similar way, the Confucian Xunzi 荀子 said that the esteemed ancient kings Tang 湯 and Wu 武 did not "take" the world, but perfected themselves so that the world automatically just "turned to them" (*guizhi* 歸之).[51]

In both the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*, the ideal ruler was both humbler and more interested in self-protection than risking his life to fulfill grandiose ambitions. In reference to *Laozi* 13, Robert Henricks says "that the person who should be entrusted with ruling the world is precisely the one who cares more for his own life than he does for the wealth, honor, and power he would have by ruling the world.[52]" This aligns well with what appears to have been Yang Zhu's 楊朱 view (c. 4th century B.C.E.).[53] The contrasting Confucians and Mohists would not necessarily have disagreed with it, but their own arguments were more moralistic. The concern shown for the welfare and activities of the people (*min* 民) in this and other chapters is not necessarily because a ruler *should*, morally, care for the people. The motive often seems more pragmatic: this is a better way to maintain a stable state, which helps one maintain one's position (and life). A content populace means less trouble for the ruler.[54] But noticeably, from the perspective of the people, and also for us, all of the suggestions are benign, if not benevolent.

The picture here painted is that despite (and *because of*) the many measures governments take in running their states, the situation keeps getting worse. For this reason, the (hypothetical?) sagely advisors (*shengren* 聖人) utter these aphorisms and hope rulers can restrain themselves and embody

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[50] *Laozi* 48. In the Mawangdui text *Cheng* 稱, *wushi* 無事 falls under the *yin* 陰 rubric, and *youshi* 有事, it's opposite, as *yang* 陽. A preference for *wushi* thus seems natural for the authors of the *Laozi*, who regularly emphasize what would be considered *yin* qualities.

[51] *Xunzi* 荀子 18, *Zhenglun* 正論. This was part of his flimsy defense of why these two ancient kings, who were famous for forcibly overthrowing their own kings, were still worthy of esteem.

[52] *Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching: A Translation of the Startling New Documents Found at Guodian*, Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 96.

[53] Yang Zhu 楊朱 will be discussed in a future essay.

[54] Although Franklin Perkins believes this view "to violate the spirit of the text," he admits that with regards to the consequences mentioned for following the text's advice, "almost all can be read in terms of self- interest — succeeding in one's endeavors, having a long life, avoiding shame, and holding a position as a leader and model. In this sense, the *Dàodéjīng* is a guide for *effective* rather than *ethical* action" (*Heaven and Earth Are Not Humane*, Indiana University Press, 2014, p. 100). Further, he points out that "some passages justify this concern for the people as a means rather than an end" and therefore, "It is thus possible to read *all* passages on concern for the people as intended toward securing the power of the ruler" (p. 250 n47).

them. For ease of memorization, it is written in metered rhyme and uses many of the same rhyming pairs of words as chapter 37, discussed earlier. The message, with the rhyming words in parentheses:

If a ruler can refrain from interfering in the lives of the people and cease trying to force (為) them to act in certain ways, the people will naturally evolve (化) all on their own.
If he can remain tranquil and still (靜), it will calm the situation and the people will naturally "fall into line" or become "correct" (正), all on their own.
If he can reduce his excessive undertakings (事), (however well-intentioned), the people will naturally find ways to prosper (富).
If he can simplify and reduce his aspirations (欲), the people will become (or remain) simpler, less complicated, more pristine (樸).

Both this chapter and chapter 37 use *zi* 自- compounds to describe the ideal outcome, and this appears to be a vision first seen in the works of the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi* and other texts now considered "Daoist."[55] A general heading for this phenomenon might be *ziran* 自然, indicating what is "so of itself," what is "natural" or "spontaneous." *Zi* 自 is a "reflexive pronoun, always occurring immediately before a verb and refers to [the] subject as agent of [the] verb."[56] *Ran* 然 means "to be so, like this."[57] Wang Chong 王充 (27– c. 100 C.E.), in his *Lunheng* 論衡, wrote a chapter on *ziran*, and identified the Daoists – *Daojia* 道家 – as the originators of this view.[58] Sima Tan also identified Zhuangzi as a proponent.[59] In these two chapters of the *Laozi*, we find idealized transformation that occurs of itself (*zihua* 自化) and rectification or stabilization that occurs of itself (*zizheng* 自正 / *ziding* 自定). Even though the sage-ruler plays a role in these, typically by *not* doing something, the people are the true agents of their own transformation, rectification, and affairs. Sometimes it happens *unintentionally* and automatically, but sometimes it is better understood as happening *voluntarily*. For example, recall *Laozi* 17's "the people assert 'we (did it) of our own accord'" (百姓曰我自然也).[60] However, the advice to refrain from

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[55] Likewise, they are associated with what Roger Ames and David Hall have termed "*wu*-forms," which are compounds beginning with the negative *wu* 無 that appear in the *Laozi*. See their *Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation*, Ballantine, 2003.

[56] *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese* by Paul W. Kroll, Brill, 2015, p. 630. Readers are advised to read Brian Bruya's excellent examination of this in his "The Rehabilitation of Spontaneity: A New Approach of Philosophy of Action" in *Philosophy East & West* 60.2, 2010, especially p. 208-213.

[57] See *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, p. 383.

[58] *Lunheng* 54 《自然篇》 .

[59] *Shiji* 63.

[60] Chapter 12 of the *Zhuangzi* similarly says "… as if they did it of themselves from their nature, while they knew not what it was that made them do so, (若性之自為，而民不知其所由然)." Translated by James Legge, *The Texts of Taoism*, Dover, 1962 (1891), p. 319.

interfering, moving, undertaking affairs, or entertaining ambition is directed to rulers, not the people themselves.

The term *wushi* 無事 is used twice in this chapter, and is nearly synonymous with *wuwei* 無為. *Shi* 事 means "to serve, to be engaged in, to work at" as well as "affairs, duties, events."[61] As mentioned with the previous chapter, there is no categorical admonition to stop *all* activities, undertakings or affairs. Nor is there a categorical condemnation of deliberate, planned endeavours. This would be both an uncharitable and implausible interpretation. There are some affairs that simply cannot be neglected.[62] Sima Tan explicitly claimed that *Daojia*'s "affairs were *few* but their accomplishments were many" (事少而功多) and chapter 64, to be discussed presently, speaks to being very careful in carrying out one's affairs:

其安易持，其未兆易謀。
其脆易泮，其微易散。
為之於未有，治之於未亂。
合抱之木生於毫末。
九層之台起於累土。
千里之行始於足下。

為者敗之，執者失之。
是以聖人
無為故無敗，無執故無失。
民之從事，常於幾成而敗之。
慎終如始，則無敗事。
是以聖人
欲不欲，不貴難得之貨。
學不學，復眾人之所過，
以輔萬物之自然而不敢為。[63]

What is still is easy to hold.
What has not yet commenced is easy to plan for.
What is fragile is easy to break.
What is trifling is easy to disperse.

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[61] *A Student's Dictionary of Classical and Medieval Chinese*, p. 415.

[62] In *Zhuangzi* 11, we read: "Affairs may be intricate and perilous but cannot be neglected" (匿而不可不為者，事也).

[63] This is the received text. Variations among the other versions are largely inconsequential. In the Guodian collection, the second half of this chapter comes immediately *before* chapter 37, discussed above, and was considered a separate "chapter" from the first half.

Act on it before it manifests, order it before it becomes disordered.
A tree that one can wrap one's arms around grew from a tiny sprout.
A terrace nine stories in height started from an accumulation of soil.
A journey of a thousand *li* began from beneath one's feet.

Those who act, ruin things; those who seize, lose things.
For this reason, sages:
Do not act and so they do not ruin things, do not seize and so do not lose things.
The people in conducting their affairs always ruin them when they are near completion.
Had they been as diligent at the end as they were in the beginning, there would be no ruined affairs.
For this reason sages:
Desire not to desire and do not value rare goods.
Learn (what) not to learn and return to what the masses have passed over.
Hence they are able to support the myriad things to be so-of-themselves, but they do not presume to make them be such.[64]

This chapter is made up of at least two separate compositions,[65] and has parallels in chapters 29 and 63. The first four lines presumably are an analogy for governing: a calm and content society is easy to maintain and troubles are easily taken care of if caught early. The Heshanggong 河上公 Commentary acknowledges that this also applies to "governing oneself" (*zhishen* 治身). Surprisingly, the text then explicitly encourages *wei*-ing: "Act on it (*weizhi* 為之) before it manifests, [66] order it (*zhizhi* 治之) before

[64] An alternate reading of this last line could be "Although they are quite capable of helping all things follow their own course (*ziran*), they would not think of doing so" (Hall & Ames, *Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation*, p. 178). Here, *wei* 為 is read virtually synonymously with *fu* 輔 "support, assist." The end could also be read where the *er* 而 in *er bugan wei* 而不敢為 is read as "and," which would yield "they are able to support the myriad things be so-of-themselves *and* not dare to act." Presumably a reading like this advocates getting the people to not interfere, over-act or act coercively so as to not ruin (*bai* 敗) their affairs. D.C. Lau translated the Wang Bi text in this manner, and the Mawangdui text identically to Ames' version, with the "not daring to do it" (不敢為) referring back to the "assisting" (輔), *Tao Te Ching*, Chinese University Press, 1996, p. 95 and 235 respectively. See Franklin Perkins' comments on this, in *Heaven and Earth are not Humane*, Indiana University Press, 2014, p. 252 n74.

[65] In the Guodian A bundle, they do not form one chapter; in Guodian C bundle, only the second part exists. In the Beida version, they are considered separate chapters as identified by the punctuation. *Hanfeizi* 21 comments on and quotes from both parts, but these are separated by commentary on two other chapters. This would seem to suggest they were separate chapters. The Mawangdui texts have little punctuation, so we cannot know whether they were considered one or two chapters.

[66] This is not the only chapter which condones acting: chapters 2, 10, 51 and 77 contain the phrase "act, but do not (generate) dependence" (為而不恃) and chapter 81 says "act, but not contentiously" (為而不爭).

it becomes disordered."[67] This is immediately followed by three sayings which illustrate the importance of recognizing that big things have small beginnings.[68] The *Yu Lao* 喻老 chapter of the *Hanfeizi* provides three examples: large dams collapsing from tiny termite holes, buildings destroyed by fire due to sparks traveling through tiny chimney cracks, and fatal illnesses whose early signs are barely perceptible. It's difficult not to see the text recommending proactive or preemptive interference here. The wise always "nip things in the bud."[69] As Angus Graham puts it:

> [The] *Laozi*, which is written from the viewpoint of the prince, is pervaded by an awareness of the uselessness of trying to control political forces, which however the ruler can guide by locating the crucial points and moments and exerting the minimum pressure to the maximum effect.[70]

Again, the *Laozi*'s advice – in chapters 44, 32 and 46 – that one needs to "know when to stop (*zhi zhi* 知止)" and "know what is enough (*zhi zhu* 知足)" is vital to keep in mind. Or chapter 9's: "To (humbly) withdraw after completing one's endeavours is the Heavenly Way" (功遂身退，天之道). Moreover, chapter 60 opens with a well-known saying that speaks to this as well: "Governing a large state is like cooking a small fish" (治大國若烹小鮮). Presumably this means that although one needs to keep a very close eye on it and keep it from burning, the less one manipulates it the better (to preserve its integrity).

The second half of the chapter begins by denouncing *wei*-ing altogether, *apparently* making a sweeping claim that anyone who acts will ruin things and anyone who seizes something will lose it. Naturally, sages refrain from acting (*wuwei* 無為) and refrain from seizing (*wuzhi* 無執); consequently, they don't suffer ruin or loss. Yet it is plainly false to claim that everyone who grasps or seizes something *always* loses it and everyone who ever acts *always* ruins things.[71] Rather than stating an objective truth, *wei*

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[67] A similar saying is found in the works of Shang Yang: "order (the state) while it is still orderly" (治之於其治); if one tries to "order it when it has become disordered" (治之於其亂), it will remain disordered (*Shangjunshu* 商君書 5). Shang Yang employs this saying to argue for increasing the severity of punishments for light offences.

[68] An observation famously uttered in the 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia* as well as in the 2012 film *Prometheus*.

[69] *Hanfeizi* 21, making references to *Laozi* 63. A similar example appears in *Heguanzi* 16 《世賢》, where the best doctor takes care of things before they have even appeared (未有形) and yet remains unheralded. The worst one takes all sorts of drastic and conspicuous measures and ironically accrues a great reputation.

[70] *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, Hackett, 2001, p. 170. (Originally published in 1981).

[71] To interpret it this way, one is either accusing the authors of committing the hasty generalization informal fallacy or one is uncharitably committing the sweeping generalization fallacy himself/herself. John Dewey once wrote "When context is taken into account, it is seen that every generalization [e.g., "those who act, ruin things"] occurs under limiting conditions set by the contextual situation. When this fact is passed over [i.e., not recorded in the written text] or thrown out of court [e.g., denied by an interpreter], a principle valid under specifiable conditions is perforce extended without limit." *The Essential Dewey: Pragmatism, education, democracy*, Volume 1, Indiana University Press, 1998, p. 209.

為 may refer to a more specific kind of action here: for example, *forceful* or *obtrusive* action, just as *zhi* 執 refers to more than simple grasping. But it also could refer to *over*-doing. Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 once argued: "Activities are like many things. If one has too much of them, they become harmful rather than good. Furthermore, the purpose of doing something is to have something done. But if there is over-doing, this results in something being over-done, which may be worse than not having the thing done at all."[72]

A parallel in chapter 29 makes a similar point:

> 將欲取天下而為之，吾見其不得已。天下神器也，不可為也，為者敗之，執者失之。
> If one wants to take the world and act (upon) it, we see that it simply cannot succeed.[73] The world is a "sacred vessel": it cannot be acted (upon). Those who act, ruin things; those who seize, lose things.

Regarding the contradiction between such suggestions to act and also not act, Michael LaFargue writes:

> From the present point of view, the main source of these apparent inconsistencies in the *Daodejing* is the habit interpreters have of trying to find some fundamental truth *of unlimited scope*, and expecting the coherence of Laoist thought to consist in the fact that it adheres to all the logical conclusions that would follow from the unlimited application of this truth. This is a mistake, because aphorisms as such are extremely context-bound. Their meaning is exhausted in the point they make about a specific situation that they address."[74]

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[72] *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*, The Free Press, 1966 (origin. 1948), p. 100, translated into English by Derk Bodde.
[73] To the best of my knowledge, this is the only place in the classical corpus where the idiom *budeyi* 不得已 means "simply cannot succeed" instead of "cannot be helped," as found in *Laozi* 31, where the text sanctions the use of weapons only "when it cannot be helped." To adopt this meaning here in chapter 29 might yield: "There are those who wish to take the world and act upon it, and we see that this is inevitable. (*But*) the world is a sacred vessel, and *shouldn't* be acted upon."
[74] *Tao and Method*, SUNY, 1994, p. 158. The religious scholar and polemicist Russell Kirkland, drawing on chapter 5 of the *Laozi*, commits this error when he argues that (classical) Daoists taught that one should emulate the impartial, uncaring Dao completely and categorically and "ought to live with no regard for others" ("'Responsible Non-Action' in a Natural World: Perspectives from the *Neiye*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Daode jing*" in *Daoism and Ecology*, Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 292). He feels that Daoists would be "morally compelled" to refrain from acting/intervening – without exception – when someone or something is threatened and goes on to argue that "a flood that affects the inhabitants of a flood plain is not a catastrophe in natural terms, only in human terms. And there is no sense in which human intervention – human activity intended to control such events – could be considered wise or appropriate" (ibid. p. 296). This is quite an uncharitable view and is clearly a logical fallacy. While it's true that the early Daoists problematized and questioned our ability to determine what is good and bad, they were not bystanders to life, completely detached from the world and dogmatically

Following LaFargue's theory about aphorisms, these suggestions are correctives – for again, it is also fallacious that *forceful* action *always* ruins things[75] – meant to address a situation or problem in early China: that being that many, if not all rulers were not attentive, careful or prepared in their governance and hence problems grew that demanded "dramatically disruptive intervention."[76] This type of forceful or coercive action naturally provokes a push-back or resistance, is often too late, and is thus both inefficient and ineffective. Social harmony can be best maintained when a ruler is very attentive and prepared and addresses problems when they barely have become problems. This requires much less effort and is, more-often-than-not, very effective.[77] Admittedly, this advice to "nip things in the bud" can be abused by a totalitarian government and used as reason to remove potential or imaginary troublemakers from society, done in secret, giving the appearance of a non-active ruler. Indeed, the *Laozi* has been condemned on numerous occasions throughout history as encouraging devious tactics. But a more benign interpretation suits the spirit of the *Laozi* better.[78]

Moreover, the text repeatedly portrays sages and sage-rulers as being "without desire" (*wuyu* 無欲); that is, virtually lacking in the kind of ambition that requires forcing the populace to follow their every whim, disrupting and often endangering their lives. In the same way, *Laozi* 19 declares that society would be better off if one "exuded purity" (*jiansu* 見素), "embraced one's original simplicity" (*baopu* 抱樸), "lessened one's personal interests" (*shaosi* 少私), and "reduced one's aspirations" (*guayu* 寡欲). Even though the advice to reduce and minimize does not go all the way to *elimination*, this hardly leaves room for an ambitious and oppressive ruler. Additionally, sages do not stir up or inspire others to go to excess, whether that be greed or vanity. Seeing that these are a significant cause of suffering in society, sages do not place value on precious metals, gems or other luxuries. Therefore they don't desire them and, serving as a model for the people, they reduce popular demand for them as well.[79]

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attached to an (exceptionless) principle of *wuwei*. While the Dao may provide living things with virtually all they need to survive, it does not need to acquire food and shelter for itself, nor does it need to care for its offspring or get along with others to survive. Clearly, readers need to remember that the emulation of the Dao is not absolute or unqualified.

[75] For example, forcing children (and adults) to obey rules or laws that are there for their safety.

[76] Michael LaFargue, *Tao Te Ching,* SUNY, 1992, p. 157.

[77] Accordingly, *Laozi* 43 explicitly refers to the "benefits of (practicing) *wuwei*" (無為之益).

[78] Benjamin Schwartz argues that unless "Laozi" is a "cunning and canny would-be statesman who wraps his Machiavellian political advice in mystical verbiage," his whole vision is contradictory and inconsistent. This is because, doing anything, no matter how slight, consists of *wei*-ing, which in his view is categorically denied by the authors. (The *World of Thought in Ancient China*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 213) But it is not, as we have seen, and LaFargue's explanations given above help make this clear.

[79] "Rare goods" – literally "goods that are difficult to obtain" (*nande zhi huo* 難得之貨) – are also mentioned in *Laozi* 3 and 12 and would seem to be regarded as particularly troublesome.

Both this chapter's illustrations about how big things have small beginnings and that the people (*min* 民) "always" fail in their undertakings due to a lack of persistent diligence or carefulness (*shen* 慎) find parallels in chapter 63. Chapter 63 observes that "the most difficult undertakings in the world develop from what was easy; the biggest of undertakings develop from what was small" (天下之難事作於易，天下之大事作於細) and that "one who believes much will be easy will experience many difficulties (多易者必多難). Thus, one best "plan for the difficult when it's still easy, manage the big when it's still small" (圖難於其易，為大於其細)[80] and sages expect and prepare for difficulties and as a result experience "no" difficulties (*wunan* 無難). The word translated as "plan" is *tu* 圖, which, as a noun, means "diagram, map" and as a verb means "to plan, map out." In this context, it might best be understood as indicating a state of expecting and *being prepared for* difficulties, rather than making specific plans to follow.[81] On the other hand, coupled with chapter 64's apparent call for "planning" (*mou* 謀) before things appear or commence (*wei zhao* 未兆), these suggestions may be counted as evidence to *reject* non-purposive, non-deliberate action as the best interpretation of *wuwei* in the *Laozi*. This preparedness would likely also apply to threats of invasion from ambitious neighbouring states. In this regard, a defense force must be deliberately trained and equipped. Although with the presence of a Daoist sage-ruler, there would be little occasion to use it. François Jullien writes:

> … no one would ever dream of erecting a statue to the best generals. For he will have gotten the situation to evolve in the desired direction so successfully, gradually intervening well in advance, that he will have made the victory seem so 'easy' that it does not occur to anyone to praise him for it. Once the engagement has taken place, people will say 'Victory was a foregone conclusion,'' thereby reducing the merit of the commander. Yet, without realizing it, they will have paid him the greatest of all compliments. It is because his merit is so complete that the victory seems natural and therefore attracts no notice.[82]

Chapter 64 finishes with affirming that sages "are able to assist/support (*fu* 輔) the myriad things be natural or so-of-themselves (*ziran* 自然) but they do not presume to make them be (*wei* 為) such." Once more, Michael LaFargue explains:

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[80] This advice is found in chapter 38 (*Nansan* 難三) and explained in the *Laozi* "commentary" in chapter 21 of the *Hanfeizi*.

[81] Note that the *Erya* 爾雅 considers *tu* 圖 and *mou* 謀 as synonymous or near-synonymous.

[82] *Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2004, p. 58; translated into English by Janet Lloyd.

> [F]rom a modern perspective, 'assisting naturalness' [*ziran* 自然] doesn't make sense. 'Natural' designates precisely what happens by itself, without any deliberate human 'assistance' … For the *Daodejing* authors, *ziran* does not designate the actual state of affairs, whatever that might be, but an *ideal* state of affairs … The ideal ruler does not impose on a society ideas hatched completely in his own head to make his mark on the world for his own glory – this, I think, is the meaning of *wuwei* in the *Laozi*. But neither does the ideal ruler stand aside and literally 'do nothing,' no matter what is happening. He is carefully attentive to the subtleties of the unique structure and dynamics of the society in his charge and works hard to bring out the best in this particular society, 'the best' being inevitably informed by his own feeling for what this society would be like at its best. Thus, the 'naturalness' (*ziran*) of the society which he 'helps along' does not represent society as it would function if it had no ruler at all. It is what we would perhaps think of as a rather 'romantic' notion of naturalness, a state both in accord with the spontaneous impulses of the community, but also in accord with some human being's notion of an ideal society.[83]

Bai Tongdong 白彤東 and Jiang Tao 蔣韜 have made similar observations about the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Clumsiness, ineptitude, volatile emotions, selfishness, disharmony, etc. are all *natural* and occur *spontaneously*, but unsurprisingly, these are not valourized in the Daoist texts. Bai writes that *ziran* "should be understood normatively. Descriptively, all things move in cycles, violent and smooth. But the *Laozi* has a moral preference for the smooth cycle, anointing it as 'natural' (in a normative sense)."[84] With regards to the *Zhuangzi*, Tao points out that "the 'natural' has its dimensions, from the clumsy (nature-human misalignment) to the daemonic (perfect nature-human alignment), and the daemonic is the highest state of being natural. To see the natural this way is to introduce human values into the natural world."[85]

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[83] *Tao and Method*, SUNY, 1994, p. 51-2. Similarly, Franklin Perkins maintains that "Sages do not just let nature go. They carefully guide and assist natural processes in order to realize a specifically human good. The ideal of non-action, *wuwei*, does not literally mean doing nothing." (*Heaven and Earth are not Humane*, Indiana University Press, 2014, p. 114). Edward Slingerland feels otherwise, as he writes "The primitive stasis that Laozi celebrates does not represent true naturalness but rather a stunting of natural human tendencies. [On the other hand,] Mencius was dedicated to naturalness in a *cultivated* sense, not the wild, weedy state of primordial nature" (*Trying Not To Try: The Art and Science of Spontaneity*, Crown Publishers, 2014, p. 122).

[84] "How to Rule Without Taking Unnatural Actions (无为而治): A Comparative Study of the Political Philosophy of the *Laozi*," *Philosophy East & West* 59.4, 2009, p. 484. I would question whether this is a *moral* preference.

[85] "Two Notions of Freedom in Classical Chinese Thought: The Concept of *Hua* 化 in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi*," *Dao* 10.4, 2011, p. 470. Note: "daemonic" is quite distinct from "demonic."

This notion of supporting or assisting things (*fu* 輔) in contrast to forcing things (*wei* 為) is found in some other texts as well. Chapter 54 of the *Lunheng* contains a passage which appears to be inspired by this chapter. It defines *wuwei* and *ziran*, explaining that these entail no desire (*yu* 欲) to do/make (*wei* 為) anything and adds that, with some things, assisting is necessary:

> 然雖自然，亦須有為輔助。耒耜耕耘、因春播種者，人為之也。及穀入地，日夜長大，人不能為也。或為之者，敗之道也。宋人有閔其苗之不長者，就而揠之，明日枯死。夫欲為自然者，宋人之徒也。
>
> However, in spite of spontaneity, there must also be activity to help (輔助). Ploughing, tilling, weeding, and sowing in the spring are human activities (人為). After the grains have entered the soil, they grow by day and night. Humans cannot force it to happen (不能為). If someone tries to do it, that would be a way to ruin (敗) them. A man of Song was sorry that his corn was not growing. He went and pulled on them. The next day he found them dried up and dead. Those who want to force things to be spontaneous (為自然) follow in the footsteps of the man of Song.[86]

Chapter 63, mentioned above, interestingly opens with a somewhat ambiguous triplet of opposites: *wei* 為 and *wuwei* 無為, *shi* 事 and *wushi* 無事, and *wei* 味 and *wuwei* 無味. To my mind, the counsel being offered is that 'less is more': act without (much) acting, attend to one's responsibilities without (assuming many) responsibilities, find flavor in what is lacking in flavor.[87] The prescription to *wei wuwei* 為無為 also occurs at the end of chapter 3:

> 不尚賢，使民不爭；
> 不貴難得之貨，使民不為盜；
> 不見可欲，使心不亂。
> 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。
> 使夫知者不敢為也。
> 為無為，則無不治。[88]

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[86] Wing-Tsit Chan*, A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, 1973 (1969), p. 298. Translation modified. The *locus classicus* for the story about the sprout-pulling man of Song is *Mengzi* 孟子 2A2. A similar point is made there, though neither *ziran* nor *wei* are mentioned. Instead, *zhu* 助 "assist," is the comparable term to *wei*.

[87] Ellen Chen, (incorporating a variant of the third item) translates this as "Do when there is nothing to do, Manage affairs when there are none to manage, Know by not knowing." (*The Tao Te Ching*, Paragon House, 1989, p. 200. This is a unique interpretation that does fit well with the themes of chapters 63 and 64.

[88] This is the received text.

Not aggrandizing "The Worthy,"
Causes the people not to compete.
Not valuing rare goods,
Causes the people to not turn to thievery.
Not showing what is desirable,
Causes the people's minds not to become anxious and unsettled.
For these reasons, under the management of a sage:
Empty, are their minds, (yet) full, are their stomachs,
Weak, are their ambitions, (yet) strong, are their bones.
(Sages) invariably bring it about that the people are lacking in "knowledge" and in desire,
And that those who do possess knowledge to not dare act on it.
Act without action, then there will be nothing not in order.[89]

Like the other chapters examined so far, this chapter also enjoins the ruler to *do* certain things to bring about and maintain a peaceful state. In a typical Laoist fashion, the would-be sage-ruler *removes obstacles* to peace and harmony. This "negative action" *causes* (*shi* 使) the desired outcome and thus appears to be purposive and even contrived. On the other hand, a less purposive reading is possible, as reflected in my *descriptive* rendering of the "management of the sage" (*shengren zhi zhi* 聖人之治) that I have adopted from Moss Roberts' translation.[90] Virtually all translators translate it causatively and more coercively: sages "empty their minds, fill their stomachs, weaken their ambitions, strengthen their bones."[91] This reading is substantiated by the repeated use of *shi* 使 in this chapter. As with other endeavours such as losing self-consciousness or attaining psychological emptiness, it is presumably only in the beginning where there is purpose involved, and the sage-ruler works more directly on himself, while the effects on the people are indirect.

The authors appear to be skeptical that there is such a thing as "healthy competition" – at least within the context they had in mind – and that rewarding "worthies" only fosters envy and resentment in the

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[89] The Beida, Mawangdui "B" and Xiang 'Er versions end differently, (Mawangdui "A" is damaged at this part), and possible variations in punctuations can yield different readings. These three have 不敢弗為 instead of 不敢為 and lack 為無為. I would follow Lau's line of thinking (in his Mawangdui translation) and read this apparently older version as "And those who do possess knowledge to not dare (use it). Not acting (on it), then there will be nothing not in order" (Beida: 使夫知不敢。弗為則無不治矣。; MWD B: 使夫知不敢。弗為而已則无不治矣; Xiang 'Er: 使知者不敢。不為則無不治。)

[90] *Dao De Jing*, University of California Press, 2001, p. 33.

[91] For examples, D.C. Lau, *Tao Te Ching*, Chinese University Press, 1996, p. 7; Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power*, Grove Press, 1994, p. 145, David Hall and Roger Ames, *A Philosophical Translation of the Dao De Jing*, Ballantine, 2003, p. 81-2, Philip Ivanhoe, *The Daodejing of Laozi*, Hackett, 2003, p. 38.

"less worthy." In their minds, discord and suffering were rampant because the people weren't being left alone to pursue a simple and peaceful existence and were constantly exposed to needless temptation. Setting the conditions whereby the people are lacking in "knowledge" and "desire" (*wuzhi* 無知、*wuyu* 無欲) is proposed as an essential way to achieve and sustain peace, though we can acknowledge that this is surely a kind of interference. "Causing the people to be ignorant/lacking knowledge" (使民無知) has often received criticism throughout history.[92] Careful readers have realized that the "knowledge" proscribed is not practical knowledge or know-how. This will be discussed more in depth in a future essay, but for now it shall suffice to say that "wiliness" and/or "academic excellence" is the target, felt largely to serve as unnecessary and disruptive abilities.[93] The consequence is that "there will be nothing not in order" (*wubuzhi* 無不治), which is another way of saying "there is nothing not done" (*wubuwei* 無不為), from chapter 37 and 48. Obviously, the authors felt that satisfying the people's *basic* needs was both fundamental *and* sufficient. The goal was a peaceful, safe, content, healthy and well-ordered society.

Finally, chapter 38 – the first chapter of the *De* 德 section and the first chapter of the entire book in the early Han – is the only chapter to connect *wuwei* and *de*. This chapter will have a fuller treatment in a later essay and so here we will focus only on the lines relevant to the discussion of *wuwei*. *De* 德 had a range of meanings in the pre-Han and Han periods, including beneficence, goodwill, character, virtue(s), and an influential and benignant inner power or potency.[94] The text observes a distinction between different kinds of *de*: that considered higher or superior (*shang* 上) and that considered lower or inferior (*xia* 下). It further compares it to the highest (上) manifestations of the common virtues *ren* 仁, 'benevolence,' *yi* 義, 'dutifulness,' and *li* 禮, 'ritual propriety, etiquette.'

上德無為而無以為。
下德為之而有以為。
上仁為之而無以為。
上義為之而有以為。
上禮為之而莫之以應，
則攘臂而扔之。[95]

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[92] Recently, Zhu Rui 朱鋭 has labeled the *Laozi*'s *wuwei* "the art of trickery," "craftiness" and "belies a purpose of control and manipulation" ("*Wu-Wei*: *Lao-zi*, *Zhuang-zi* and the Aesthetic Judgement" in *Asian Philosophy* 12.1, 2002, p. 54-5). But see Joel Kupperman's examination of "manipulation" in *Classic Asian Philosophy: A Guide to the Essential Texts*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 108-110.

[93] See "Conceptions of Knowledge in Ancient China" by Christoph Harbsmeier in Ep*istemological Issues in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, SUNY, 1993, p. 21-22.

[94] See my "The Evolution of the Concept of *De* 德 in Early China," *Sino-Platonic Papers* 235, 2013.

[95] This is the received Wang Bi text. There are numerous variations among the various recensions. Instead of 上德無為而無以為, the text accompanying Yan Zun's commentary and *Hanfeizi* 20 reads 上德無為而無不為; however, the following

With superior *de*, there is no *wei*-ing and there are no reasons for *wei*-ing.
With inferior *de*, (there is) *wei*-ing and there are reasons for *wei*-ing.
With superior benevolence, (there is) *wei*-ing but there are no reasons for *wei*-ing.
With superior dutifulness, (there is) *wei*-ing and there are reasons for *wei*-ing.
With superior etiquette, (there is) *wei*-ing, and if there is no response,
Then arms are bared in order to force compliance.

This section of the chapter also contains a contrast between *wuyiwei* 無以為 and *youyiwei* 有以為. This expression literally addresses having or lacking the means or grounds (*yi* 以) to *wei*,[96] and these means are most likely reasons, purposes, or motives. Since this addresses the internal or psychological aspects of *wei*-ing and not *wei*-ing, we can regard *wei* by itself more simply as (external) activity.[97] Nonetheless, it is unlikely to refer to every action one can take. The context is that of human interactions, so the type of action likely implied is what we would call 'interference,' or 'obtrusive action': action that is intended to *force* a response (*ying* 應). Accordingly, one with Superior *de* does not act on or interfere with others and lacks reasons or ulterior motives to act/interfere. They do not strive or deliberately try to act in a "virtuous" way or influence others. One with Inferior *de* deliberately acts/interferes and possesses reasons or ulterior motives to act/interfere. Such a person strives deliberately and self-consciously to influence others and act in a "virtuous" way, with preconceptions of what this entails.

The chapter then deals with three traditional virtues — benevolence (*ren* 仁), dutifulness (*yi* 義), and etiquette (*li* 禮) — that Confucians championed. Benevolence is viewed somewhat favorably (at least its highest expression: *shangren* 上仁),[98] in that although it involves action/interference, it does not do so for predetermined reasons, that is, it seems to come naturally. Dutifulness, (or, conventional morality), is considered fully inferior to (Superior) *de*, since it is characterized by both actions/interference and predetermined, inculcated reasons. Ritual propriety or etiquette is both

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lines have either 無以為 or 有以為 just as the Wang Bi text has. *Wubuwei* 無不為 thus seems to be a later emendation and as D. C. Lau recognized, Han Fei's commentary actually supports the 無以為 reading (*Tao Te Ching*, p. 180). Neither Mawangdui texts contain the line 下德為之而有以為. Without it, the text runs very smoothly from 上德 to 上仁, 上義 and then 上禮. On the other hand, the contrast between 上德 which is lacks *wei*-ing and 下德 which *wei*-s is fitting.

[96] I am reading 以 as 所以, and thus: 無所以為 and 有所以為. See Edward Pulleyblank, *Outline of Classical Chinese Grammar*, University of British Columbia Press, 2003 (1995), p. 49.

[97] This is contrary to Erica Fox Brindley, who seems to understand *wuwei* in the *Laozi* to always involve the absence of these reasons/purposes (*yi* 以) (*Individualism in Early China*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2010, p. 158 n29).

[98] It is unclear to me why the adjective *shang* is needed for 仁, 義, 禮, since there is no mention of their inferior (*xia* 下) manifestations.

forced and coercive and is but a superficial representation of the integrity (*zhongxin* 忠信)[99] considered necessary for social harmony, and further leads to social chaos (e.g., duplicity, distrust). *De* is clearly something which is deemed superior to these three virtues. The fact that true *de* does not involve any action or interference and that it lies above all human-conceived virtues and their expression in conduct suggests that *de* here is a benignant power or influence, rather than some kind of highly-regarded type of conduct, collection of virtues or character traits. Consequently, a person who embodied such *de* would find little need to directly act or interfere in the world. The chapter concludes by saying that the "great elders" (*dazhangfu* 大丈夫) choose the more genuine and artless way of interacting with others. Such a person could be a ruler, but not necessarily so.

A policy of non-interference or minimal interference would seem unproblematic in a state or country where things are running fairly smoothly. And policies of reducing distractions, radiating influence (*de* 德), and of nipping things in the bud appear to be reasonable ways of fostering peace and well-being. But if things do 'turn south,' what course of action might a Daoist sage-ruler take to address what the *Mozi* 墨子 calls the "afflictions of the world" (*tianxia zhi hai* 天下之害), which are variously identified as the strong taking from the weak, the many oppressing the few, the rich disrespecting the poor, the noble lording it over the humble and the cunning taking advantage of the simple-minded? Some, like Russell Kirkland, maintain that "the Daoist trusts that the world is already operating as it is supposed to be operating and that all human activity – no matter how well-intentioned – can only interfere with the course of nature as it is already unfolding,"[100] adding that any interventionist activity "will lead, ineluctably, to unintended, but quite avoidable, tragedy"[101] so that the "mature" and "morally responsible course" is to not act. Kirkland privileges certain passages, taking them literally and giving them unlimited scope but also ignores passages examined above which do allow a certain kind of intervention. More contrary evidence can be found in the *Laozi*, as when the text says that the Dao (chapters 10? and 51) and the sages (chapters 2 and 77) "act but do not (generate) dependence" (*wei er bushi* 為而不恃)[102] and chapter 81's affirmation that sages "act, but do not contend" (*wei er buzheng*

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[99] *Zhongxin* (忠信), or *zhong* and *xin* are two other "Confucian" virtues which are mentioned later in this chapter, but are not evaluated. They are often translated as "loyalty" and "trustworthiness." The *Shuowen Jiezi* defines *zhong* as "respect(fullness)" (*jing* 敬) and *xin* as "sincerity, integrity" (*cheng* 誠). Paul Goldin has suggested "being honest with oneself in dealing with others" as an appropriate gloss of *zhong* in some pre-Qin texts ("When *Zhong* 忠 Does Not Mean 'Loyalty'" in the journal *Dao*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2008), p. 169), whereas Axel Schuessler suggests "sincere, loyal, integrity" (*ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*, p. 621).

[100] "'Responsible Non-Action' in a Natural World: Perspectives from the *Neiye*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Daode jing*" in *Daoism and Ecology*, Harvard University Press, 2001, p. 288.

[101] Ibid., p. 294.

[102] *Wei er bushi* 為而不恃 is a very ambiguous phrase. Who is the agent of the acting? Who does not depend on (恃) whom? Translators disagree. Moreover, early manuscripts such as the Guodian and Mawangdui A have 志 rather than 恃. Although

為而不爭). To his credit, Kirkland does correctly acknowledge that the *de* of the sage is claimed to have profound and substantial beneficial effects in the world and a number of scholars have observed that the *Laozi* concentrates instead on the root causes of the world's ills, such as desire/ambition, not on the "branches" or symptoms.

The "Legalists"

In the 4th century B.C.E. – the period when the *Laozi* apparently began to be compiled – lived two political philosophers, Shen Buhai 申不害 (c. first two-thirds of the century) and Shen Dao 愼到 (c. second half of the century), whom Sima Qian labelled Huang-Lao 黃老 enthusiasts/practitioners[103] and were later classified under the *Fajia* 法家 or so-called "Legalist" label.[104] The ostensible written material we now possess of theirs has been recovered from other later texts and may not represent their authentic works. However, the consensus is that they are relatively reliable, even if written by later thinkers who tried to preserve their teachings. Both of these thinkers apparently used the term *wuwei* and/or the related concept, *wushi* 無事.

Shen Buhai 申不害, or simply Shenzi 申子, was from the small state of Zheng 鄭. After it had been annexed by Han 韓, Shen remarkably climbed the ranks to become its prime minister under Han's Marquis Zhao 韓昭侯 (r. 362 – 333 B.C.E.).[105] Although his knowledge and ideas about governing must

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this would count as a significant difference in meaning, both characters were written similarly in the Warring States script and since other manuscript variants are 寺, 侍 and 持, I will provisionally go with 恃. Although *Laozi* 34 says of the Dao that "the myriad living things depend on it to live" (萬物恃之而生), I read 為而不恃 according to a similar usage found in *Zhuangzi* 7, where Lao Dan says of the enlightened king: "His transforming influence falls on the myriad things but *the people* do not depend on him" (化貸萬物而民弗恃). The opposite idea can be found in *Hanfeizi* 32《外儲說右上》: "One who tames crows cuts off the lower feathers, for cutting these ensures that the bird must depend upon him for food. How could it not become tamed? This is also so of the way in which the enlightened ruler trains his ministers" (夫馴烏者斷其下翎焉。斷其下翎，則必恃人而食， 焉得不馴乎？夫明主畜臣亦然). The point, found throughout the *Laozi*, is that the ideal ruler will generally leave everyone to take care of themselves, but when something needs to be done to maintain a thriving harmonious state it will (ideally) be done at the earliest stage and will be extremely subtle. This fosters a populace that is relatively independent and self-sufficient and establishes the ruler as inconspicuous and unobtrusive.

[103] *Shiji* 63 and 74 respectively.

[104] *Hanshu Yiwenzhi* 漢書 • 藝文志. *Shiji* 130 also discusses *Fajia*, but, as with all six *jia*, does not mention any names. "Legalism" is a poor translation/interpretation of *Fajia*. See "Persistent Misconceptions about Chinese 'Legalism'" by Paul Goldin in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38:1, 2011.

[105] *Shiji* 15《六國年表》. For a thorough study of Shen Buhai, see Herrlee G. Creel's *Shen Pu-hai : A Chinese Political Philosopher of the Fourth Century B.C.*, University of Chicago Press, 1974. For a more concise treatment, see Creel's entry in *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide*, SSEC and IEAS, 1993. For a critical review, see Thomas Metzger's ""Ultimate Wisdom" or "Applied Psychology"? -- A Review of Creel's Shen Pu-Hai" in *Early China* 2, 1976.

have been extensive, he became best known for his emphasis on administrative techniques (*shu* 術, *shi* 埶) and (matching) (per)form(ance) and names (*xingming* 刑名),[106] but his writings also refer to *wuwei*:

> 故善為主者，倚於愚，立於不盈，設於不敢，藏於無事，竄端匿跡，示天下無為。是以近者親之，遠者懷之。示人有餘者人奪之，示人不足者人與之。剛者折，危者覆，動者搖，靜者安。
>
> Therefore the skillful ruler avails himself of (an appearance of) stupidity, establishes himself in insufficiency, places himself in (a posture of) timidity, and conceals himself in inaction (無事). He hides his motives and conceals his tracks. He shows the world that he does not act (無為). Therefore those who are near feel affection for him, and the distant think longingly of him (that is, desire to become his subjects). One who shows men that he has a surplus has (his possessions) taken from him by force, but to him who shows others that he has not enough, (things) are given. The strong are cut down; those in danger are protected. The active are insecure; the quiet have poise.[107]

This advice seems to recommend deception in order to win friends and stay safe and shares a network of ideas with the *Laozi*. Examples would be appearing stupid (*yu* 愚): *Laozi* 20; being "insufficient" (*buying* 不盈): *Laozi* 15, 22, 45; timidity (*bugan* 不敢): *Laozi* 3, 67, 69, 73; "inaction (*wushi* 無事): *Laozi* 48, 57, 63; having surplus (*yu* 餘): *Laozi* 20, 77; not having enough (*buzhu* 不足): *Laozi* 77; the pitfalls of being strong (*gang* 剛): *Laozi* 78, (36 [*qiang* 強], 76 [*jianqiang* 堅強]); the advantages of stillness (*jing* 靜): *Laozi* 15, 16, 26, 37, 45, 57, 61; and of course, *wuwei* 無為.[108] A "Laoist interpretation" of "conceals himself in inaction (*wushi* 無事)" would be that the skillful ruler keeps himself out of sight and the people's business, by refraining from undertaking many affairs. "He shows the world that he does not act (*wuwei* 無為)" suggests that the one thing he doesn't keep hidden is his penchant for not interfering or acting coercively. Presenting oneself as nonthreatening and lacking worth presumably makes others a) more cooperative and b) less likely to bother with you, (e.g., steal, invade). Herrlee Creel felt that "when Shen recommends non-action, he means that the ruler should normally be inactive, and act only when it is unavoidable, and then no more than the situation demands,"[109] which is very reminiscent of the *Laozi*. Having labelled Shenzi "Huang-Lao," it appears Sima Qian felt that he was

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[106] Additionally, with "" (埶) in Xunzi XX.

[107] Trans. by Herrlee Creel in *Shen Pu-hai: A Chinese Political Philosopher of the Fourth Century B.C.*, p. 349.

[108] *Shiji* 63 "quotes" Laozi: "I have heard that a good merchant fills his storehouses but appears to have nothing; a true gentleman is overflowing with virtue but looks as if he was a fool." (吾聞之，良賈深藏若虛，君子盛德容貌若愚。), which obviously bears resemblance to Shen's statement.

[109] *Shen Pu-hai: A Chinese Political Philosopher of the Fourth Century B.C.*, p. 67.

influenced by Laozi, or the *Laozi*; however, having lived in the 4th century B.C.E. makes the claim moderately questionable. The direction of influence could've gone the other way, as Herrlee Creel believed,[110] or could have gone both ways. No doubt, we will never know.

Another statement of Shen Buhai's runs as follows:

> 鏡設精，無為而美惡自備；衡設平，無為而輕重自得。凡因之道，身與公無事，無事而天下自極也。
>
> "(The ruler is like) a mirror, (which merely) reflects the light (that comes to it, itself) doing nothing (無為), and yet, (because of its mere presence) beauty and ugliness present themselves (to view). (He is like) a scale, (which merely) establishes equilibrium, (itself) doing nothing; yet (the mere fact that it remains in balance causes) lightness and heaviness to discover themselves. (The ruler's) method is (that of) complete acquiescence (因). (He merges his) personal (concerns) with the public (good, so that as an individual) he does not act (無事). He does not act, yet (as a result of his non-action) the world (brings) itself (to a state of) complete (order)."[111]

Like chapters 37 and 57 of the *Laozi*, the ruler's (relative) non-interference allows for the world to right itself.[112] As we saw in a previous essay, chapters 7 and 13 of the *Zhuangzi* also speak of the mirror-like (鏡) mind of the sage and both mirrors and scales do not impose their will on things, do not have any personal motives or bias. As Creel notes, their response or actions are completely determined by the situation.[113] *Yin* 因, "to rely on, adapt to, accommodate, accord with," or Creel's "acquiesce," does not occur in the *Laozi*, but appears four times in Sima Tan's description of *Daojia*[114] and plays a

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[110] "On the Origin of *Wu-wei* 無為."

[111] Trans. by Herrlee Creel in *Shen Pu-hai : A Chinese Political Philosopher of the Fourth Century B.C.*, p. 351-2.

[112] Similar to the *Laozi*, the results are described by a number of "*zi*-forms": *zibei* 自備, "become present of themselves," *zide* 自得, "be realized automatically," and *ziji* 自極, "reach perfection of itself." Elsewhere in the *Shenzi* fragments we find "Names become rectified of themselves, affairs become settled of themselves" (名自正也，事自定也). Creel acknowledged both Shen Buhai and the *Laozi* advocating leaving things alone to work themselves out, but names others in history who have said this and concludes "There is nothing exclusively Daoist about the idea that a great many situations will work themselves out if they are simply left alone." (ibid. p. 174) This is largely irrelevant, in my opinion, for *within the context of ancient China*, very few seemed to have made this recommendation and/or emphasized it.

[113] *Shen Pu-hai*, p. 92. Moreover, this seems to be an example of what David Loy calls "nondual action," whereby action is done, but without the motives of an agent, or where "there is no awareness of the agent as being distinct from 'his' act." ("*Wei-Wu-Wei*: Nondual Action" in *Philosophy East & West* 35.1, 1985, p. 76).

[114] *Shiji* 130: 道家 … 以因循為用 … 因時為業 … 因物與合 … 因者，君之綱.

significant role in later "Daoist" texts such as the *Zhuangzi*, *Guanzi*, *Huainanzi*, etc. and, as we will see, is explicitly connected with the concept of *wuwei*.

A doctrine found in a number of texts is perhaps connected to Shenzi through a passage now found in the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 chapter 17.3《任數》, which Creel feels confident is inspired by Shen,[115] that being: "With the kings of old, that which they actively did was slight; that which they adapted to was much. Adapting (to the situation) is the method of the lord; engaging in action is the way of the subordinates" (古之王者，其所為少，其所因多。因者，君術也；為者，臣道也).[116] While not explicitly conceived as opposites, *yin* and *wei* are presented as significantly distinct: whereas *yin* implies accommodating others and acquiescing or adapting to the given situation, *wei*, as it is in the *Laozi*, implies asserting or imposing oneself on the situation or others. But it is only the ministers and officials who are to *wei*: as the *Shenzi* says, the ruler sets up the basics (*ben* 本, *yao* 要), while his subordinates carry out the details (*mo* 末, *xiang* 詳); and: "one who possesses the Way does not participate in (為) the affairs (事) of the various officials, yet he is the director of good order" (有道者不為五官之事，而為治主).

Sources like *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 chapter 34 quote Shenzi as cautioning that people, most likely ministers and officials, are diligently watching the ruler so as to find ways to deceive and manipulate him. The answer is that, "only by *wuwei*, one can observe and assess them" (惟無為可以規之). This is followed with similar advice from one Tang Yiju 唐易鞠 and explained by "an elder of Zheng" 鄭長者,[117] who says "(Be) fallow,[118] inactive and invisible" (夫虛靜無為而無見也) and in chapter 37 also says this is

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[115] *Shen Pu-hai*, p. 179-80.

[116] Creel translates this on page 376 of his *Shen Pu-hai* and discusses the entire chapter on pages 179-186. He translates *yin* as "acquiescence."

[117] It's not clear that Zhengzhang means "elder of Zheng," as I can't locate similar expressions, e.g., elders of Chu, Qi, Zhao, Han, Qin, etc. in the early texts. Roger Ames speculated "If the character *zheng* in the elder of Zheng does in fact refer to the state of Zheng which was annexed by Han in 375 B.C., the elder of Zheng was a native of the same state as Shen Buhai, lived at approximately the same time as Shen Buhai (d. 337 B.C.), and propounded a doctrine of *wuwei* which appears to be very similar if not identical with that of Shen Buhai. This does not mean that the elder of Zheng is necessarily an alternative designation for Shen Buhai, although it is a possibility. And even if the elder of Zheng and Shen Buhai are not one and the same person, there would seem to be enough information to trace the Legalist interpretation of *wuwei* to the Zheng/Han region during the first half of the fourth century B.C." (*The Art of Rulership*, SUNY, 1994, p. 50)

[118] *Xujing* 虛靜, "fallow" would seem to be a single term or binome (*shuangyinjieci* 雙音節詞), judging from its various occurrences in pre-Han (e.g., *Hanfeizi*, *Zhuangzi* ?) and Han texts (e.g., *Zhuangzi* ?, *Huainanzi*, *Wenzi*, *Shuoyuan* 說苑, *Chunqiu Fanlu* 春秋繁露). By itself, *Xu* 虛 means "empty; insubstantial; false" and *jing* 靜, "still, tranquil." "Fallow" would seem to incorporate both of these senses (as well as potentiality). *Qingjing* 清靜 ("pure" + "still") is another binome incorporating *jing* 靜 that is common in Daoist texts or texts discussing Daoist ideals.

what "embodying the Dao" (*tidao* 體道) means. The *Hanshu Yiwenzhi* lists one *pian* or "chapter" of writings by this so-called "elder of Zheng" in the *Daojia* section.

Shen Dao 慎到 (c. 350 – 275 B.C.E.), was from Zhao 趙, to the north of Han and Zheng. He eventually ended up near the east coast, in Qi 齊, settled at Jixia 稷下. There he taught and debated, and *Shiji* 74 records he wrote 12 discourses (*lun* 論), and that, "together with" Tian Pian 田駢, Jiezi 接子 and Huan Yuan 環淵, "they each studied the methods of Huang-Lao and Dao and *de*" (皆學黃老道德之術).[119] His collected writings, the *Shenzi* 愼子, were subsequently identified as "legalist" but ceased to be transmitted as a whole centuries ago, but have been assembled by Paul M. Thompson.[120] The material in these recovered fragments appear to cohere with the ideas ascribed to him in the *Xunzi* (chs., 6, 17, 21), and *Hanfeizi* (ch. 40), but not so much the last chapter of the *Zhuangzi* (*Tianxia* 天下, "All Under the Heavens").[121] A more in-depth treatment of him will occur in a future essay.

Like Shen Buhai, Shen Dao used the term *yin* 因, "adapt," to identify the proper way for a ruler to govern:

> 天道因則大，化則細。因也者，因人之情也。人莫不自為也，化而使之為我，則莫可得而用矣。
>
> The Natural Course of things (*Tiandao* 天道) is such that adapting leads to great results and that (forcing) change leads to paltry results. 'Adapting' means adapting to the dispositions of the people. (Now) among people there are none who don't act for themselves. If one tries to (forcibly) change them and cause them to act for oneself, one will find none who can be obtained and utilized.

Laozi 57 assures that by refraining from acting or interfering (無為), the people will transform *on their own* (*zihua* 自化), in positive ways. Shen Buhai's and Shen Dao's use of *yin* 因 is in some ways equivalent to the *Laozi*'s use of *wuwei*, and where *wei* 為 implies imposing one's will on the world through coercive action and interference. Refraining from imposing oneself on the world is to be sensitive to, adapt to, and rely on what is given, on what is there.[122] Shen Dao's use of, (and disinterest in), *hua* 化 "to

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[119] Chapter 33 of the *Zhuangzi* also mentions Shen Dao in connection with Tian Pian, as well as Peng Meng 彭蒙.

[120] *The Shenzi Fragments*, Oxford University Press, 1979. Other important studies of him include John Emerson's *Shen Dao: text, Translation, and Study*, Éditions Le Real, Corrected edition, 2013 and Eirik Lang Harris' *The Shenzi Fragments: A Philosophical Analysis and Translation*, Columbia University Press, 2016.

[121] And not so much in the handful of Warring States bamboo slips held at the Shanghai Museum entitled "愼子曰恭儉," Cf. 《上海博物館藏戰國楚竹書（六）》

[122] We must admit, though, that it is notoriously difficult to please or accommodate everybody.

transform, to evolve," involves the conviction of the futility of trying to *force* things to transform or evolve. The *Laozi*'s standpoint is that *there are* ways for that transformation to transpire naturally, and feels it's worth investigating.[123]

Also from among his fragments is:

> 君臣之道，臣事事而君無事；君逸樂而臣任勞；臣盡智力以善其事而君無與焉，仰成而已；故事無不治。治之正道然也。
>
> "The way of the prince and the minister: the minister performs his task and the prince has no task (無事); the prince is relaxed and happy and the minister takes on the labor; the minister uses all his knowledge and strength to perform his tasks satisfactorily, and the prince does not share in the labor, but merely waits for the tasks to be finished. As a result, every task is taken care of. The correct way of government is thus."[124]

Han Fei 韓非, (d. 233 B.C.E.), was a member of the ruling house of Han 韓 and is probably the most famous "Legalist." Again, however, Sima Qian saw him as a representative of Huang-Lao,[125] no doubt because a) he explicitly incorporated ideas from Shen Buhai and Shen Dao (both also labelled as Huang-Lao), b) the text carrying his name includes two chapters which attempt to explain the *Laozi* (i.e., chs. 20, 21), and c) some of the work in the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 show obvious influence from the *Laozi* (e.g., chs. 5, 8). Like his predecessors, Han argued that the enlightened ruler does not interfere in the world, although his subordinates do, and since everything has its own natural abilities or aptitudes, they should be allowed to perform them. Moreover, the ruler needs to conceal any preferences, knowledge or abilities he has and simply observe (and dispense rewards and punishments to) his many officials, who are all self-interested and eager to manipulate him.

In chapter 51 of the *Hanfeizi*, "Prominent Teachings" (*Xianxue* 顯學), we find a rejection of the views endorsed in the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* that people will evolve and become orderly of themselves (*ziran* 自然). The author argues that since bamboo for arrows will never become "straight of itself" (*zizhi* 自直)

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[123] Criticism of *hua* – as opposed to *zihua* – *is* found in the Guodian proto-*Laozi*'s version of chapter 19. The text contains "絕慺," "get rid of 慺," and elsewhere in the text 慺 apparently stands for *hua*. I agree with Robert Henricks that this should be interpreted as an admonition to eliminate *forced* transformation of the people. See note #43 above.

[124] Translation by John Emerson in *Shen Dao: text, Translation, and Study*, Éditions Le Real, Corrected edition, 2013, p. 63, with minor modification.

[125] *Shiji* 63.

and that wood for wheels will never become "round of itself" (*ziyuan* 自圜), the people will not "become good of themselves" (*zishan* 自善), not without the tools of rewards and punishments. Thus the enlightened ruler places no value on and does not rely on the people rectifying themselves. The analogy is not altogether legitimate, for people are not inert pieces of wood that have no inclinations to self-organize. Moreover, the Daoist texts do recognize that "tools" are needed to guide the people in desirable directions, but they are much gentler and subtle, and their efficacy relies more on removing obstacles to social harmony and contentment.

The *Zhuangzi*

As discussed in an earlier essay, the *Zhuangzi* is a multi-authored and heterogeneous text containing writings dating most likely from the late 4th century to the early 2nd century B.C.E. Although the first seven chapters – the *Neipian* 內篇, or "Inner Chapters" – are generally now considered the oldest, Esther Klein has presented a serious challenge to this theory.[126] Instead of beginning with them, we will continue with a couple of examples of the Huang-Lao interpretation of *wuwei*, which, as we have seen, appears to be quite old. Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢 has argued that chapters 11(b)-16 and 33 belong to a (pre-Qin Dynasty) Huang-Lao school of thought (Huang-Lao *pai* 黃老派), and Angus Graham has avoided that label and opted for *Laozi*-centred syncretists, (of the early Han dynasty).

Chapter 11 proclaims *wuwei* to be the Heavenly Way (*Tiandao* 天道) and *youwei* 有為 – it's opposite: to engage in action – to be the Human Way (*Rendao* 人道). Furthermore, rulers (should) practice/embody the Heavenly Way and subjects (should) practice/embody the Human Way and be involved in and encumbered by (*lei* 累) activity. Chapter 13, Heaven's Way 天道, speaks of the stillness or serenity (*jing* 靜) of a sage's mind which allows him or her to attain clarity (*ming* 明) and reflect or perceive the world and all living things within it. We read that "fallowness, tranquility, silence and *wuwei*" (虛靜、恬淡、寂漠、無為)[127] are the invariables of the universe, the culmination of (embodying) the Dao and it's power (*de* 德) and foundations of the myriad living things. According to their place in the world, those who have insight (*ming* 明) into this will be the most respected and successful. They will be in harmony with the Natural World (*yu Tian he* 與天和) as well as the Human World (*yu Ren he* 與人和). It continues to describe idealized "emperors and kings" (*diwang* 帝王) who regard *wuwei* as their most enduring standard (*chang* 常). For,

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[126] "Were there 'Inner Chapters' in the Warring States?" in *T'oung Pao* 96, 2011.

[127] I've added the punctuation in this series of terms for clarity. I take *xujing* 虛靜 "fallowness" to be a binome (*shuangyinjieci* 雙音節詞) like the other three; Cf. note #118 above.

無為也，則用天下而有餘；
有為也，則為天下用而不足。
故古之人貴夫無為也。

With *wuwei* they could employ the world and still maintain a surplus.
With *youwei* the world will employ them but will find them insufficient.
Therefore the ancients valued *wuwei*.

But it is only those at the top who are to practice or embody *wuwei*:

上無為也，下亦無為也，是下與上同德，下與上同德則不臣；
下有為也，上亦有為也，是上與下同道，上與下同道則不主。

When superiors practice *wuwei* and inferiors also practice *wuwei*, this means that both inferiors and superiors share the same ethos (*de*), and when both inferiors and superiors share the same ethos, then there will be no one to serve as subordinates. When inferiors practice *youwei* and superiors also practice *youwei*, this means that both superiors and inferiors share the same *dao*, and when superiors and inferiors share the same *dao*, then there will be no one to serve as ruler.

上必無為而用天下，下必有為為天下用，此不易之道也。
Superiors should surely practice *wuwei* and employ the world;
Inferiors should surely practice *youwei* and be employed by the world.
This is a *dao* that should not be altered.

Clearly these authors believed that this sort of hierarchical system was natural[128] and the one that worked best, but best for whom? We might suspect it is best for the ruler, who can relax and live off others. We might suspect it is best for the higher-ranking ministers, officials and aristocracy who wish to keep the ruler out of their way. This isn't necessarily a "bad thing," for it all depends on the quality of those officials and the ruler. Proponents of the "performance-and-name" (*xingming* 形名/刑名) procedure like Shen Buhai – and the author of this passage – had a "bureaucratic" approach to filling

[128] Later in the passage, we find: "The ruler comes first, the minster follows; the father comes first, the son follows; the elder brother comes first, the younger follows; the senior comes first, the junior follows; the man comes first, the woman follows; the husband comes first, the wife follows. Being exalted or lowly, first or last, belongs to the progressions of Heaven and Earth; therefore the sage takes his model from them" (君先而臣從，父先而子從，兄先而弟從，長先而少從，男先而女從，夫先而婦從。夫尊卑先後，天地之行也，故聖人取象焉。), (trans. By Graham: *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters*, Hackett 2001 [1981], p. 261).

official positions whereas Confucians and Mohists had a more ambitious, "moralistic" approach.[129] The "subordinates" (*chen* 臣) would not necessarily only refer to all the various officials but also workers, farmers, artisans, soldiers, merchants, etc. They can all benefit from being managed competently and fairly. Accordingly, In what seems clearly a reference to the views of Shen Buhai, the ruler is responsible for the basics (*ben* 本, *yao* 要), while his subordinates are responsible for the details (*mo* 未, *xiang* 詳).[130] And finally, reminiscent of the *Laozi*:

天不產而萬物化，
地不長而萬物育，
帝王無為而天下功。

Heaven does not give birth and rear and yet the myriad things evolve (of themselves),
Earth does not cause growth and yet the myriad things are nourished (of themselves),
Emperors and kings do no interfering and yet the world enjoys achievements (of itself).

As Roger Ames has pointed out, the *Laozi*, or Lao Dan, is associated with *wuwei* in numerous places in the *Zhuangzi*.[131] *Wuwei er wu buwei* 無為而無不為 appears in four chapters: 18, 22 (quoting *Laozi* 48), 23, and 25. Chapter 18, "Perfect Happiness" (*Zhile* 至樂), is a chapter that considers what it means to be "*le* 樂," which normally means "happy" or "joyful," but here would seem to refer to being "content." Typically, people want to stay alive and enjoy various pleasures. The author questions these goals and whether the steps taken to realize them actually work. Death is universally feared and avoided, but the author presents several stories and arguments that challenge this as well. The author declares that he regards *wuwei* as true happiness/contentedness and explains that happiness does not need to be *made* to happen or sought after deliberately: "Heaven does nothing and thus is pure; Earth does nothing and thus is peaceful. When they both do nothing together, all of the myriad things evolve (of themselves)" (天無為以之清，地無為以之寧，故兩無為相合，萬物皆化). He also paraphrases *Laozi* 37: "Heaven and Earth do nothing and yet there is nothing not done" (天地無為也，而無不為也).[132]

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[129] Editor and commentator Guo Xiang 郭象 is recorded as saying that he removed material dealing with performance-and-names when making his edition of the *Zhuangzi*. See "*Chuang Tzu*: Text and Substance," by Christopher Rand in the *Journal of Chinese Religions* 11, 1983, p. 12-13.

[130] See Creel, *Shen Pu-hai: A Chinese Political Philosopher of the Fourth Century B.C.*, p. 190-1.

[131] *The Art of Rulership*, p. 46.

[132] In my view, the Dao of Heaven and Earth (天地之道) is basically synonymous with just the Dao 道. The difference might be that the Dao transcends Heaven and Earth in space and time.

The connection between *wuwei* and (*zi*)*hua* (自化) we found in *Laozi* 37 and 57 occur in a number of places in the *Zhuangzi*, including chapter 17, where we are told that we need not worry about what we should do and not do (何為乎？何不為乎？), for things will surely "evolve of themselves"; chapter 12, where we told that "the ancients who took care of the world were without desire and so the world was content, refrained from interfering (無為) and so the myriad things evolved (of themselves), were profoundly tranquil and the people were stabilized (of themselves)" (古之畜天下者，無欲而天下足，無為而萬物化，淵靜而百姓定);[133] and chapter 11, where the fictional "Cloud Commander," Yun Jiang 雲將, perceived that the natural world was in a state of disharmony and wanted to "fix it" (*weizhi* 為之) and foster all living things. He asked the eccentric "Vast Obscurity," Hong Meng 鴻蒙, who at first refused to answer – which was a common trope – but finally recommended "rest in non-interference and things will evolve of themselves" (處無為，而物自化) and that things will "come to life and grow of themselves (*zizheng* 自生). Undoubtedly, the authors placed positive value on *hua*, forasmuch as they did not imagine or intend *hua* to mean *de*volving and "ending" in mal-adaptiveness, distress or disharmony.

Earlier in *Zhuangzi* 11 we find,

君子不得已而臨莅天下，莫若無為。
無為也，而後安其性命之情。
故
貴以身於為天下，則可以託天下；
愛以身於為天下，則可以寄天下。

For a superior person who has no choice but to oversee the world,
Nothing is better than refraining from acting (*wuwei*).
(if he can) refrain from acting,
Afterwards he can be secure in the essentials of his nature and destiny.
Therefore,
'If you govern the world as you value your own person,
You can be entrusted with the world.'
'If you govern the world as you care for your own person,
You can be relied upon (to care) for the world.'

[133] Like *Laozi* 57, *jing* 靜 and *ding* 定 (or *zheng* 正, a cognate used in the *Laozi*), *wei* 為 and *hua* 化 and *yu* 欲 and *zhu* 足 (or *pu* 樸 in the *Laozi*) all rhyme.

The last two lines come from chapter 13 of the *Laozi*.[134] *Wuwei* may signify here not interfering with or imposing one's will on the world. The passage continues to describe characteristics of the "superior person," a parodied use of Confucian terminology, and finishes the description with: "casual, carefree and doing nothing, and the myriad things are like dust on the wind. 'What time,' (he would say,) 'do I have to govern the world!'" (從容無為而萬物炊累焉。吾又何暇治天下哉！). Editor and commentator Guo Xiang 郭象 (252 – 312 C.E.) insisted that *wuwei* "does not mean to fold one's hands and be silent" (無為者，非拱默之謂也).[135] Yet, "casual and carefree" (*congrong* 從容) and "do nothing" (*wuwei* 無為) together seem to refer simply to not doing anything in particular,[136] not deliberating and acting for a purpose, and in this chapter's context, not trying to force a pre-determined concept of order on the world. This is followed by an anecdote where the question is put to Lao Dan: "If no one governs/orders the world, how can we safeguard people's minds?" (不治天下，安藏人心？). Lao Dan warns that one must "refrain from meddling with people's minds" (無攖人心), and probably refers to attempts by Confucians, Mohists, and others to reform (*hua* 化) the people.[137] After passing a negative judgement on the attempts of various ancient kings, Confucians and Mohists, the author loosely quotes chapter 19 of the *Laozi*: "Cut off (so-called) sageliness and abandon (so-called) wisdom and the world will be thoroughly well governed" (絕聖棄知，而天下大治。). All of these suggest that the way the Chinese world was being governed was not working, was too ambitious and meddled too much in people's lives. The recommendation would appear to be to stop doing *anything* to govern the world. Yet, as in the *Laozi*, hyperbole is surely at work.

Wuwei only appears a few times in the Inner Chapters, and only in chapter 6's characterization of the Dao does it appear to carry any philosophical weight. In chapter 1, "Carefree Wandering," *Xiaoyaoyou* 逍遙遊, Zhuangzi's "friend" Huizi tells him that, like his useless Ailanthus tree, Zhuangzi's views are all useless (*wuyong* 無用). Zhuangzi points out that both weasels and yaks are both useful *and* useless and amusingly asks why he doesn't "plant his useless tree in the Region of Nothing Whatsoever, in the Wilds of Spacious Nothing, and walk all around it, doing nothing (*wuwei*), or take a carefree nap at its base? " (樹之於無何有之鄉，廣莫之野，彷徨乎無為其側，逍遙乎寢臥其下). Similarly, in chapter 6, "The Great Ancestral Teacher," *Dazong Shi* 大宗師, Confucius tells his disciple Zigong 子貢 about the three exotic "mystics" who transcended the mundane world and "walked about beyond the dust and

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[134] They are also quoted in *Huainanzi* 12 and *Wenzi* 8. Some variations occur between different versions of the *Laozi* and texts that quote it, but are largely insignificant. For example, *Wenzi* 8 has 治天下 for the *Laozi*'s 為天下, "governing the world."

[135] *Zhuangzi zhu* 莊子注.

[136] Joel Kupperman writes "When someone asks 'What are you doing?' and you answer 'Nothing,' this may mean that you were doing nothing special, or nothing out of the ordinary, or nothing that stands out. Only rarely does it mean that you are stock still." (*Classic Asian Philosophy: A Guide to the Essential Texts*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 104-5)

[137] Presumably, this is what *cang* 藏, "safeguard," refers to.

grime, carefree, in their task of doing nothing" (彷徨乎塵垢之外，逍遙乎無為之業).[138] *Wuwei* here, as in chapter 1, is associated with *xiaoyao* 逍遙, "carefree, free and easy," and appears to mean simply "doing nothing in particular" rather than anything with philosophical significance.[139] In fact, Laozi in chapter 14 of the *Zhuangzi* would appear to define *xiaoyao* as *wuwei*: 逍遙，無為也. Although this usage and that found in the *Laozi* should not be interpreted overly literally, the use in the Inner Chapters is undoubtedly much less important, and other than describing the Dao as *wuwei* – among other things – in chapter 6, the author(s) of the Inner Chapters was/were either unaware of the *Laozi*'s usage or had little interest in it.

Nevertheless, the *Zhuangzi* abounds in passages which assert that people, more so rulers, should not impose their will or values on or interfere with others, or the world in general. The reasons are rarely ethical, (i.e., that it is *wrong* to do so), but mostly because doing so will *at best* have mediocre results and will often make things worse.[140] In addition, doing so will sometimes make one's own life more miserable or endanger it. Again, this urging to refrain from interfering with things or imposing one's will on them must not be taken as an exceptionless absolute. One cannot grow/acquire food, build shelter or raise children without imposing one's will or interfering with things to a certain extent. Russell Kirkland, on the other hand, has argued that the equanimity Zhuangzi expressed when his beloved wife died, for example, would apply when any creatures are about to die.[141] But notably, Zhuangzi's acceptance was not immediate, and her death was presumably from natural causes. Kirkland would appear to believe that Zhuangzi would stand by, completely detached, and watch his wife be murdered, completely attached to his principle of non-intervention. Or if his children were playing in a field and a brush fire was rushing towards them, he would just sit back and watch what happened. This is the kind of absurdity we arrive at when we take calls for *wuwei* to be unconditional dogma.

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[138] This expression is also found in chapter 19, but ending in 無事之業 instead of 無為之業. This same variation is found in *Huainanzi* 2 and 7 and *Wenzi* 2 and 3.

[139] Some scholars would disagree. For example, Alan Fox writes that in chapter 1, *wuwei* "suggests a kind of flitting about like a butterfly, at the mercy of the breeze and yet still somehow managing to travel from flower to flower, effectively arriving at its natural destination" ("Reflex and reflectivity: *Wuwei* in the *Zhuangzi*" in *Hiding the World in the World*: *Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*, edited by Scott Cook, SUNY, 2003, p. 209 [originally pub. in *Asian Philosophy* 6.1 1996]). However, Fox's analogy is perhaps too embellished, as the passage does not at all suggest that Huizi will effectively carry out his daily tasks by means of *wuwei*.

[140] "Worse" is apparently not a desired scenario and is negatively valued. It is unclear whether the author felt it to be unethical or wrong to unnecessarily contribute to making things worse.

[141] "'Responsible Non-Action' in a Natural World: Perspectives from the *Neiye*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Daode jing*," p. 189-90.

A parable in the Inner Chapters, which, despite *not* using the term, is often used to explain Zhuangzi's conception of *wuwei* is the story of Cook Ding 庖丁 explaining his graceful butchering art to his ruler. Ding claims that after nineteen years he can finally allow (and trust) his spirit (*shen* 神) to guide him, all the while "following the natural grain" (*yi hu tianli* 依乎天理) and "adapting to what is inherently so" (*yin qi guran* 因其固然). He encounters no ligaments, tendons or bones because his knife effortlessly glides through the spaces (*jian* 間) and as a result his knife never needs sharpening or replacing, whereas less adept butchers have to replace their blades often. In effect, this story argues that imposing one's will on the world *without being adaptive* has mediocre and unsatisfying results.[142] In fact, Xunzi criticized Zhuangzi for being obsessed with the natural (*tian* 天) and the resulting affirmation of adaptation (*yin* 因).[143]

For Cook Ding, the butchering of oxen begins intentionally and likely on a specific schedule; that is, *not* spontaneously. Moreover, his skill took years of practice.[144] Aside from this, however, the most skillful (and satisfying) manner of carrying out this undertaking is by relinquishing deliberate and planned action (*wei* 為) and proceeding intuitively and spontaneously.[145] Although Ding "interferes" with the integrity of the ox carcass and does in fact "impose his will" on it, he goes with the grain of the flesh: he doesn't force his way through, and because of this, he meets little resistance and his blade lasts forever. A similar example can be found in chapter 18 in a parable about an amazing (white water) swimmer, who "follows the way of the water and does not (consciously) pursue his self-interest" (從水之道而不為私焉). The moral of the story is that to live a long, satisfying life, it is best to intuitively conform to the patterns and principles of the world, the natural *and* human worlds. Although not explicitly applied to governing, the practice of Cook Ding to follow the patterns and move in the spaces

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[142] One wonders if this non-adaptive method is what the author considered skill (*ji* 技), for he compares it to his preferred way (*dao* 道), which "transcends skill" (*jin hu ji* 進乎技). (Most translators take *dao* here as *the* Dao and not *a dao*.)

[143] *Xunzi* 21, *Jiebie* 解蔽.

[144] Edward Slingerland thus maintains that "any *wuwei* worth having … has been guided and shaped by conscious design and instruction" (*Trying Not to Try*, p. 78; cf. p. 82, 122). Likewise, Chris Fraser writes "in most cases, a substantial portion of the Background capacities that enable *wuwei*-like activity to occur will have been acquired intentionally, through deliberate training and education, and will be largely the products of the agent's motivations, values, culture, and so forth." ("*Wu-wei*, the Background, and Intentionality," p. 88)

[145] The last part of the story would seem to observe that there will sometimes be "complicated parts" (*zu* 族) that require one sharpen one's focus even more, and be very careful. This *might* entail less intuition and more deliberate attention to detail. Arthur Waley had a different interpretation of this difficult part. He maintained the text was corrupt, and read *zu* 族 in the same way as it appears several sentences earlier, as referring to "mediocre" cooks (*Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*, Stanford University Press, 2004, [originally pub. in 1939], p. 48).

(which offer the least resistance), could be applied to governing or even warfare.[146] This would call for subtle and careful action in governing, achieving much by doing little.

Another passage which doesn't mention *wuwei* but conveys an attitude about coercive governing techniques and forced reformation (*hua* 化) is found in chapter 9, "Horse's Hooves," *Mati* 馬蹄, which is often labeled as the work of a so-called "primitivist":

馬，蹄可以踐霜雪，毛可以禦風寒，齕草飲水，翹足而陸。此馬之真性也。
雖有義臺、路寢，無所用之。
及至伯樂，曰：「我善治馬。」
燒之剔之，刻之雒之，
連之以羈馽，編之以皁棧，
馬之死者十二三矣；
飢之渴之，馳之驟之，整之齊之，
前有橛飾之患，而後有鞭筴之威，
而馬之死者已過半矣。
陶者曰：「我善治埴，圓者中規，方者中矩。」
匠人曰：「我善治木，曲者中鉤，直者應繩。」
夫埴、木之性，豈欲中規矩鉤繩哉？
然且世世稱之曰：「伯樂善治馬，而陶、匠善治埴木。」
此亦治天下者之過也。
吾意善治天下者不然。
彼民有常性，織而衣，耕而食，
是謂同德；一而不黨，命曰天放。

A horse's hooves can tread upon frost and snow, its hair can withstand the wind and the cold. It eats grass and drinks water; it prances about briskly. This is a horse's true nature. Though one might provide a horse with magnificent terraces and splendid bedrooms, they are of no use to it. But then came Bo Le, who said, 'I am skilled at training horses.' And men began to singe them, clip their hair, trim their hooves, and brand them. They led them with bridles and hobbles, lined them up in stable and stall, resulting in the deaths of two or three out of ten. They made the horses go hungry and thirsty, raced

[146] In other ox butchering parables, *Guanzi* 29 and *Huainanzi* 11 also mention these spaces (*jian* 間) and *Lüshi Chunqiu* 9.5 and *Xinshu* 新書 2.3 mention the patterns (*li* 理). In the pre-Han military classics, adapting to circumstances was emphasized. For example, In Sunzi's *Art of War* 《孫子兵法》, chapter 6《虛實》, we find "Water flows in accordance with the terrain; soldiers bring about victory in accordance with the enemy. Therefore, a body of soldiers has no constant configuration; a body of water has no constant form. He who can gain victory in accordance with the transformations of the enemy is called prodigious" (水因地而制流，兵因敵而制勝。故兵無常勢，水無常形，能因敵變化而取勝者謂之神。) (Modified trans. of Victor Mair, *The Art of War*, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 99).

them, and galloped them, arrayed them in rows and columns. In front were the tribulations of the bit and the ornamental halter, behind were the threats of the whip and the crop, resulting in the deaths of over half the horses.

The potter said, 'I am skilled at working clay. My round pieces fit the compass and my square pieces fit the L-square.'

The carpenter said, 'I am skilled at working wood. My angular pieces fit the bevel and my straight pieces match the ruler.' Yet is it in the nature of clay and wood that they wish to fit the compass, the L-square, the bevel, and the ruler?

Nonetheless, generation after generation extol them, saying, 'Bo Le was skilled at training horses; the carpenter and the potter are skilled at working clay and wood.'

This is also the error made by those who govern all under heaven. I suspect, however, that those who are [truly] skilled at governing all under heaven would not do so. Their people, having a constant nature, would weave cloth to wear and plow the land in order to eat. This is called having a 'common ethos.' They would remain unified and not split into factions; this condition we may style 'natural freedom.'[147]

The word translated by Mair as "training," "working" and "governing" is *zhi* 治, and is largely synonymous with *wei* 為. Thus, the author believes it is self-evident that a ruler should generally leave the people alone and to practice non-interference; for (1), their (simple) lives are sufficient, and (2), the unity of society will be broken apart with too much meddling. Thus, it is thus either ineffective and/or makes things worse. It is also possible that he regarded it as *morally* wrong to coercively impose your will on things. Ideally, "only when pressed, should one respond; only when forced, should one move to action; only when it cannot be helped, should one rise up … (and do no more than) conform to the natural patterns" (感而後應，迫而後動，不得已而後起。 ... 循天之理).[148] Almost certainly, this disposition of restraint has required more than simple experience, but of intent and value.

Guanzi

In the *Guanzi*, *wuwei* occurs by far the most in chapter 36, "Techniques of the Mind, Upper Section," *Xinshu Shang* 心術上, which we have already seen appears related to "Daoist texts" such as the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Huainanzi*, etc. The author advised the ruler to be calm (*jing* 靜), free from desire/ambition

[147] Slightly modified translated by Victor Mair in *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu*, Bantam, 1994, p. 80-1.

[148] *Zhuangzi* 15. Additionally, three times in chapter 11 and once in chapter 19 we are informed that sometimes there are things that "cannot be not done/neglected" (*buke buwei* 不可不為).

(*yu* 欲), and, like Shen Buhai and Shen Dao, non-interfering (*wuwei*, *wushi*) while the officials take care of all affairs (*shi* 事). The text uses the analogy of the relationship between the heart/mind and the sense organs and bodily apertures: "The techniques of the mind entail non-interference and yet (still) regulates the apertures" (心術者，無為而制竅者也). He also used *yin* 因 to explain *wuwei*: "The way of *wuwei* is to adapt. 'Adapting" is to neither add to nor subtract from (the situation)" (無為之道，因也。因也者，無益無損也).[149] Further, the text instructs "Do not be proactive, and thereby observe the situational criterion" (毋先物動，以觀其則), which echoes Shen Buhai's advice to remain still in order to better observe things.[150] *Wuwei* thus appears to indicate nonassertive or non-impositional action that conforms to the situation; it entails not proactively interfering with things or situations.

> 君子不忒乎好，不迫乎惡，恬愉無為，去智與故。其應也，非所設也；其動也，非所取也。過在自用，罪在變化。是故有道之君子，其處也若無知，其應物也若偶之。靜因之道也。
>
> The superior person is not enticed by his likes and not coerced by his dislikes; is serene, refrains from interfering, and dispatches (so-called) wisdom and (being constrained by) precedent. His responses are not predetermined, his movements not preselected. Mistakes lie in relying (solely) on one's own opinions. Transgressions lie in (forcing) change. For these reasons, when a superior person who has the Way is at ease it appears that he is ignorant and when he responds to things appears to be in perfect accord with them. (This is) the way of tranquility and adaptation.

The explanation section of the text asserts that having no predetermined responses or movements is what "adaptation" (*yin*) is all about; *yin* involves "taking things, rather than oneself, as guiding standards" (舍己而以物為法者也). Harold Roth explains that "Adaptation refers to the sages' ability to go along with other things and not force them into a predetermined mould."[151] We readily find this idea repeated in the *Huainanzi* and in *Shiji* 130's description of the Dao-specialists (*Daojia*).

The "Inner Workings" (*Neiye* 內業) chapter of the *Guanzi* (#49) is focused on helping one attain a tranquil, still and well-ordered heart-mind. The text argues that "with a well-ordered mind within (治心在於中), the world without will also be well-ordered" (*tianxia zhi* 天下治), which seems directed at rulers or potential rulers. Further, by undertaking the quietist practices introduced in the text the

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[149] This comes from the commentary section of this text.

[150] As seen above, quoted in *Hanfeizi* 34.

[151] "Daoism in the *Guanzi*" in *Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy*, Liu Xiaogan ed., Springer, 2015, p. 273 n21. "Forcing change" is explained in the comment section as leading to disorder (*luan* 亂).

people of the world will submit or acquiesce (of themselves) (*tianxia fu* 天下服, *tianxia ting* 天下聽[152]). As Erica Fox Brindley observes in the *Laozi*, these texts contain little to no recommendations to the masses to practice *wuwei* or self-cultivation practices and instead, "describe a situation in which the attainment of the common people occurs only as a result of the sage-king's personal attainment."[153]

In chapter 2 of the *Guanzi*, "Conditions and Circumstances" (*Xing Shi* 形勢), we find a claim reminiscent of the *Laozi*: "(If) those above refrain from undertaking affairs, then the people will make an effort on their own" (上無事，則民自試). The explanation (*jie* 解) section explains it this way: "The enlightened ruler, in governing the realm, calms his people and does not trouble them, gives them leisure and does not overwork them. Since he does not trouble them, the people will follow of their own accord. Since he does not overwork them, the people will make an effort on their own" (明主之治天下也，靜其民而不擾，佚其民而不勞。不擾則民自循，不勞則民自試).[154] This saying has a specific target, and should not be considered a law of Nature or unconditional truth.

The *Huainanzi*

It would seem that by the 2nd century B.C.E. very few thinkers could avoid discussing or mentioning *wuwei*. The *Huainanzi* 淮南子, completed by 139 under the patronage of the king of Huainan, Liu An 劉安, is no exception, especially since it is heavily influenced by the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. As we will see, the predominant interpretation of *wuwei* in this text also clearly derives from or is influenced by 4th century thinkers Shen Buhai and Shen Dao, as well as the anonymous authors of the *Guanzi Xinshu* texts.[155]

In chapter 1, "The *Dao* (as) the Source" (*Yuan Dao* 原道), we read of the legendary sage-emperor Shun 舜 (trad. 3rd millennium B.C.E.) who, early on, engaged in various activities such as farming and fishing. Despite not instructing people to do so, he inspired many to follow and imitate him. He thus transformed (*hua*) the people with spirit-like efficacy which was held to be due to his unassuming 'charisma' (*xuande* 玄德). In the same way, he was able to manage various foreign groups and reform customs and conventions. This leads to a description of a sage or sage-ruler that curiously segues into an explanation of *wuwei*:

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[152] These latter two expressions do not appear in any texts believed to date from earlier than the 3rd century B.C.E.

[153] *Individualism in Early China*, p. 47-8.

[154] Translated by W. Allyn Rickett in *Guanzi*, Vol. I, Cheng & Tsui, 2001 (orig. pub. 1985), p. 68. The translation of the title is also adopted from Rickett.

[155] Shen Dao has been suggested by some Chinese scholars as the author of one or more of the *Xinshu* texts.

是故聖人內修其本，而不外飾其末，保其精神，偃其智故，
漠然無為而無不為也，澹然無治而無不治也。
所謂無為者，不先物為也；所謂無不為者，因物之所為也。
所謂無治者，不易自然也；所謂無不治者，因物之相然也。

> Hence, sages internally maintain their roots and do not externally embellish their branches. They preserve their quintessential spirit and withdraw from (so-called) wisdom and (being constrained by) precedent. Serene, they do nothing (*wuwei*), yet there is nothing not done (*wu buwei*). Quiescent, they order nothing, yet there is nothing not ordered.
>
> That which we call 'doing nothing' is not acting before things/events; that which we call 'nothing not done' is (what unfolds) having adapted to what is done by things. That which we call 'ordering nothing' is not altering what is so-of-itself; that which we call 'nothing not ordered' is (what unfolds) having adapted to the order that obtains mutually between things.[156]

The explanation given for the saying "Serene, they do nothing, yet there is nothing not done. Quiescent, they order nothing, yet there is nothing not ordered" appears to be later insertion into the text, and the connection to the accomplishments of Shun is tenuous.[157] Yet again, refraining from being *pro*active, interfering, or imposing one's will on a situation (or things) and adapting to things as they are (*yin* 因), is brought forth to explain what *wuwei* is. Barry Allen explains:

> When the text explains "no deliberate action" [i.e., *wuwei*] as not anticipating, it alludes to the importance of timeliness and knowing when. One who does not anticipate does nothing premeditated, does not calculate what is coming in order to act preemptively. Instead one waits and responds to things as they arise. When the text explains "nothing left undone" as adapting to what is already done, it refers to how art can make

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[156] *Yin wu zhi xiangran* 因物之相然 is ambiguous. Harold Roth (et al.) translate it as "to adapt to how things are mutually so" (*Huainanzi*, p. 59) and Roger Ames and D.C. Lau as "making use of the mutual recognition that obtains among things" (*Yuan Dao: Tracing Dao to its Source*, Ballantine, 1998, p. 93). My translation is slightly more wordy than Roth's, but I think we are conveying the same idea: refraining from imposing order (*wuzhi* 無治) is to accord with the order that exists or develops naturally between things, and this is what is meant by "nothing not being ordered" (*wu buzhi* 無不治).

[157] A parallel of this explanation of *wuwei* (and *wuzhi* 無治) in *Wenzi* 1, "*Dao Yuan* 道原," does not mention Shun but is instead preceded by: "The affairs of the world cannot be forcibly done. (Instead, one needs to) adapt to what is so-of-itself and promote it. The alterations of the myriad things cannot be prevented. (Instead, one needs to) grasp the essentials and return to them" (天下之事不可為也，因其自然而推之，萬物之變不可救也，秉其要而歸之。).

> contingently co-occurring things function harmoniously together. When it explains "not governing" as not changing how things are naturally so, relying on what happens spontaneously, it implies that *wuwei* action is inconspicuous in its beginnings and irresistible in its tendency, seeming inevitable and impersonal rather than a willful purpose.[158]

In the next section, those who have obtained the Dao (*dedaozhe* 得道者) are "tranquil and without solicitude, their movements do not fail to be timely as they circulate and revolve around the myriad things. Never anticipating or taking the lead in action, they respond (only) when stimulated" (恬然無慮，動不失時，與萬物回周旋轉，不為先唱，感而應之).

Another description of sages in the first chapter holds that they

不以人滑天，
不以欲亂情，
不謀而當，
不言而信，
不慮而得，
不為而成，
精通于靈府，
與造化者為人。

Do not allow the artificial to interfere with the natural;
Do not allow their desires to overwhelm their genuine responses.
They make appropriate judgments without prejudging;
They win others' trust without speaking;
They attain without planning;
They achieve without acting (*wei*).
Their vital essence circulates into their 'Spiritual Storehouse,' and
They become human along with what fashions and transforms them.[159]

"They achieve without acting," (or, "do not act, and yet achieve"), (*buwei er cheng* 不為而成) is taken from a description of sages in *Laozi* 47. Enjoining the reader/listener to place more value on naturalness, the author argues that those who do so are empowered, in association with the Dao ("that which fashions and transforms"). Without prejudging, planning, contriving or acting they achieve their

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[158] *Vanishing Into Things*, Harvard University Press, 2015, p. 24.

[159] Translation loosely based on Roth in *Huainanzi*, p. 58.

ends, (or ends people are naturally disposed to). Yet again, these claims should not be regarded too literally or taken to be exceptionless. For, as Michael LaFargue emphasized that in the common proverb "slow and steady wins the race," there is no claim that fast people will never win races,[160] we should not, in regards to *wei*-ing, conclude that *wei*-ing always prevents achieving one's goals. S*ometimes* it does, but a more spontaneous and natural approach is suggested here to be more efficient. Confucians like Mengzi, Xunzi and Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.E. – 18 C.E.) also associated this spontaneous efficacy with naturalness, or Heaven (*Tian* 天).[161] Nonetheless, we can find several assertions in the classical texts that achievements or successes cannot be realized by doing nothing, as, for example, it is asked "If one doesn't plan, how can one gain? If one doesn't act, how can one achieve?" (弗慮胡獲？弗為胡成？) in a later addition to the *Shangshu*,[162] or "(one who) hesitates to act will lack achievements, (one who) hesitates in affairs will lack success" (疑行無成，疑事無功), cited by Shang Yang 商鞅 in the *Shangjunshu* 商君書, chapter 1. Neither of these truly contradict the recommendations in the *Huainanzi* or *Laozi*, however, for they are different perspectives applied in different scenarios. Again, Michael LaFargue explains: "When someone is deciding whether to take a risk, I might choose say 'Better safe than sorry' or I might choose to say 'Nothing ventured, nothing gained.' The crucial issue behind this choice is not which saying is objectively more true, but which saying I think puts this particular situation in the right perspective."[163] Moreover, the *Huainanzi* and *Laozi* draw attention to what they consider the height of efficacy and efficiency; that is, where one *virtually* does nothing at all to realize one's goals. Barry Allen writes:

> *Wuwei* action is more than merely efficient, for more is measured than cost and benefit. The idea, as I understand it, is to maximize the *difference* between effectiveness and intervention, with 'doing nothing' and 'nothing left undone' as the ideal limiting case. It takes art to eschew instrumentality without sacrificing effectiveness. A sage has a knack for getting the world to do the heavy lifting, for being in the right place at the right time, for being lucky. Of course, it is not luck; it only looks like luck to one who would not

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[160] *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching*, p. 201.

[161] For examples: *Mengzi* 5A6: "When no one does it and yet it is done, (then it's a result of) Heaven/Nature" (莫之為而為者，天也); *Xunzi* 17: "Achievement that was not purposely done, attainment that was not sought for: this is deemed Heaven's/Nature's work" (不為而成，不求而得，夫是之謂天職). Additionally, in the *Liji Aigong Wen* 禮記•哀公問 we find "Doing nothing and yet things are completed, this is the Way of Nature" (無為而物成，是天道也); and in his *Fayan* 法言•問道, Yang says that *Tian* "acts without acting" (無為之為)

[162] Chapter 16, *Tai Jia xia* 太甲下, believed to be a 4th century C.E. forgery by many. James Legge translates this as "what attainment can be made without anxious thought? what achievement can be made without earnest effort?" in *The Chinese Classics* Vol. III, Part I, Hongkong and London, 1865, p. 211. Note: this chapter also recommends being "careful at the end as in the beginning" (慎終于始) which we have seen also recommended in chapter 64 of the *Laozi*.

[163] *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching*, p. 203.

know what to do with those little things even supposing he could see them. The art of the *dao*, of viably changing with changes, is a technics of exquisite minima.[164]

Chapter 9 of the *Huainanzi*, "Techniques of Rulership" (*Zhushu* 主術), deals – as the title suggests – with governing. Right from the opening line, it quotes *Laozi* chapter 2, but also alludes to Shen Dao and/or the Huang-Lao application of *wuwei*:

人主之術，
處無為之事，而行不言之教，
清靜而不動，
一度而不搖，
因循而任下，
責成而不勞。

The techniques of (good) rulers (involve),
'Resting in affairs that entail non-interference and proceeding with unspoken instructions.'
Clear and still, they do not move.
(With this) single standard, they do not waver.
Adaptive and compliant, they employ their inferiors.
(In this way)
Their responsibilities are fulfilled, and yet they do not (themselves) toil.

As per Shen Buhai,[165] Shen Dao, Hanfei and the *Zhuangzi* syncretist authors, it is the ruler who practices *wuwei*, who refrains from interfering in the world, while his subordinates carry out the details of government. The quote from *Laozi* 2 in the second line was a popular one, for it is also found – in one form or another – in the *Guanzi*, *Zhuangzi*, *Wenzi*, *Zhanguoce* 戰國策, *Chunqiu Fanlu* 春秋繁露, and *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經 (*Suwen* 素問). All of the country's affairs as well as the government's responsibilities "stem from what is naturally so" (*you ziran* 猶自然) and are taken care of naturally and voluntarily by those below, needing no instruction from the ruler. The ruler, for his part, is disciplined, unwavering, and resists the temptation to get involved; he "does not move" (*budong* 不動) and "does not toil" (*bulao* 不勞). Not "toiling, drudging" (*lao* 勞) appears meant to narrow the meaning of "not moving," which of course, is certainly not to be taken literally. The *ideal* is to have a ruler whose simple presence or force of character (*de* 德) is enough to encourage everyone in society to "step up to the plate" of their own accord and attend to the various necessary projects as they occur. The ruler

[164] *Vanishing Into Things*, p. 69.

[165] Only if Creel is right about the *Lüshi Chunqiu* passage examined earlier being an expression of his views.

should not be seen as a lazy, arrogant person who thinks work is beneath him, nor one whose ministers relegate him to the background. Nor should he been conceived as one who feels he can and should impose his own vision upon the world. Clarified later in the chapter, "*Wuwei* does not mean (that the ruler) does not move (*budong*) because he is hindered or obstructed, but rather that nothing originates from him personally (無為者，非謂其凝滯而不動也，以言其莫從己出也). While the ideal ruler surely has *some* personal input into how his country is governed, (e.g., he has some idea of, and a desire to foster an ideal, thriving society[166]), he achieves it by adapting (*yinshun* 因循) to the given situation, and ideally, by doing *almost* nothing.

Chapter 13 contains a passage that contrasts "one who is/does good" (*weishanzhe* 為善者) to one who isn't/doesn't. The former is "tranquil and *wuwei*," while the latter is "agitated and has many desires" (*zao er duoyu* 躁而多欲). Contrasted with excessive desires, *wuwei* appears here to denote an absence of desire-driven activity or undertaking (selfishly) ambitious projects. It is exemplified in practicing non-interference, stemming from possessing less ambition to meddle in the world. But *wuwei* cannot be pin-pointed on a scale. Both remaining absolutely still and governing in a *less* intrusive way are examples of *wuwei*.

Chapter 19, "Cultivating Effort" (*Xiuwu* 脩務), is regarded by many scholars to contain a redefinition of *wuwei*.[167] The author argues that the legendary sage-rulers Shennong 神農, Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹 and Tang 湯 worked relentlessly and toiled (*lao* 勞) to make the lives of others better, and so those who endorse an understand of *wuwei* as being "silent, without making a sound, reticent and unmoving; not coming when pulled, not going when pushed" (寂然無聲，漠然不動，引之不來，推之不往) are deluded. This appears to be a strawman argument. The target of this criticism would seem to include the author of chapter 9, who, for example, *did* associate "not moving" (*budong*) with *wuwei*; but that author clarified that it does not mean complete inaction. Nonetheless, they certainly had different opinions on who did or did not toil (*lao*). Moreover, many of the texts examined so far regarded adapting and responding to circumstances to be indicative of *wuwei*, which is the antithesis of being stubbornly immovable and unresponsive (i.e., not coming when pulled, not going when pushed). If the populations under these five sage-rulers were indeed well-off, the *typical* Daoist attitude would be to ascribe that to refraining from interfering in their lives, not to assertive, toiling activity by the rulers. But also, they would not completely abstain from interfering altogether. And when they did, it would

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[166] See above quote by LaFargue regarding *Laozi* 64's remark on how the sage "supports the myriad things to be so-of-themselves" (輔萬物之自然).

[167] For example, see *The Huainanzi*, Major et al., p. 757, *The Art of Rulership*, Ames, 219 n34, and "Root-Branches Structuralism in the *Huainanzi*" by Andrew Meyer in *The Huainanzi and Textual Production in Early China*, Sarah Queen and Michael Puett eds., Brill, 2014, p. 37-8.

involve minimum effort but have maximum results. There is reason to believe, however, that there *were* some – perhaps recluses – who defended their obstinate refusal to be a part of or contribute to society by claiming to be following a (respectable) doctrine of *wuwei*, and this author was addressing this interpretation.[168]

Regardless, the author unfolded his view using a contrast of *wuwei* and its opposite: *wei* or *youwei* 有為:

> 若吾所謂「無為」者，私志不得入公道，嗜欲不得枉正術，循理而舉事，因資而立功，推自然之勢，而曲故不得容者，故事成而身弗伐，功立而名弗有，
> 非謂其感而不應，迫而不動者。若夫以火熯井，以淮灌山，此用己而背自然，故謂之有為。若夫水之用舟，沙之用鮭，泥之用輴，山之用蔂，夏瀆而冬陂，因高為山，因下為池，此非吾所謂為之。[169]

> What I call *wuwei* (means) not allowing private ambitions to interfere with the public Way, not allowing lustful desires to distort upright techniques. (It means) complying with the inherent patterns of things when initiating undertakings (*shi*), according with (*yin*) the natural endowments of things when establishing accomplishments, and advancing the natural propensities of things so that misguided precedents are not able to dominate. Thus, the undertakings (*shi*) of government will succeed, but (you) personally will not be glorified. (Your) accomplishments will be established, but your reputation will not obtain.
>
> (*Wuwei*) does not mean that a stimulus will not produce a response or that when compelled (you still) do not move. If you use fire to dry a well or use the Huai (river) to irrigate a mountain, these are cases of imposing yourself in contradiction of the natural course (of things). Thus I would call such (activities) 'doing' (*youwei*). But if on water you use a boat, in the sand you use a *shu*, in the mud you use a *chun*, in the mountains

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[168] The author of the postface (i.e., chapter 21) held that this less-than-profound (*wei shen* 未深) essay (i.e., chapter 19) at least helped illustrate that those who appropriated the term *wuwei* to justify their laziness or indulgences (with regards to governing) were deluded and "obstructed from the Great Dao" *(sai yu dadao* 塞於大道). Li Si 李斯, the prime minister during the short-lived Qin Dynasty (221 – 206 B.C.E.), is recorded in *Shiji* 87 as disqualifying those who "remain for long in a mean position or state of destitution, criticizing the world and detesting profit, giving oneself over to Non-activity [*wuwei*]" (久處卑賤之位，困苦之地，非世而惡利，自託於無為) as members of the respectable *shi* 士 class. A similar-sounding group is criticized in *Zhuangzi* 15 and labeled as "*shi* of the rivers and seas" (*jianghai zhi shi* 江海之士). These examples would seem to suggest that some regarded *wuwei* to require a dogmatic refusal to play a role in society.

[169] This is the emended CHANT text of the *Huainanzi*. Another version appears in *Wenzi* 6.

> you use a *lei*, in the summer you dig (ditches), in the winter you pile up (dikes), in accordance with a high place you make a mound, and following a low one you dig a pond, these (activities) are not what I could call 'doing' (*wei*).[170]

Wei is understood – again – as involving "imposing yourself in contradiction of the natural course (of things)" (*yongji er bei ziran* 用己而背自然). *Wuwei* is similarly understood to involve dismissing one's private ambitions and lustful desires, not allowing them to interfere (*ru* 入) with the "ways of the public" (*gongdao* 公道). Still, some dissonance exists for this author who wants to maintain esteem for the ancient sage-rulers like Yao, Shun and Yu but also admits that truly efficacious rulers will not be "glorified" or gain "reputations." Other Daoist writings frequently criticize these "culture heroes" for needlessly complicating and disordering the world. But this author does not, and like Confucians and Mohists, quotes from the *Odes* often and uses the moralized appellation of *junzi* 君子 to label his ideal person (in addition to *shengren* 聖人).[171] Chapter 20 is the same, defending the legendary culture heroes against these types of charges by declaring them to have abided by "adaptation" (*yin* 因) – and hence, the spirit of *wuwei* – despite imposing their will on the world in deliberate attempts to control things. For this author, *yin* didn't mean adaptation so much as "starting from what is already present," and included significant interference.

The mid-3rd century B.C.E. work, *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 contains a chapter – chapter 25 《*You Du* 有度》 – which Harold Roth, following Andrew Meyer, believes to represent the work of (Huang-Lao) Daoists.[172] It argues that good rulers, like the rulers of old, "grasp Oneness" (*zhiyi* 執一) and do not attempt to know or do everything themselves. The author appears to quote a passage – now found in chapter 23 of the *Zhuangzi* – that prescribes eliminating superfluous mental entanglements and blockages. If achieved, one will "then be upright, being upright, then one will be quiescent, being quiescent, then one will be clear and enlightened, being clear and enlightened, one will be empty, being empty, then one will be able to 'do nothing, and yet there will be nothing not done'" (則正，正則靜，靜則清明，清明則虛，虛則無為而無不為也).[173] The next section continues with a defense of limiting *wuwei* to rulers, much like Shen Buhai, Shen Dao and the *Zhuangzi* syncretist authors:

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[170] Slightly modified translation of Queen and Major in *The Huainanzi*, p. 770-1.

[171] Although the author wrote positively about Confucius and Mozi, he apparently saw himself as distinct from them, claiming "A proficient man is not necessarily the exact same as Confucius or Mozi" (通士者，不必孔、墨之類).

[172] *Original Tao*, p. 199; p. 239 n50.

[173] See *The Annals of Lü Buwei*, by John Knoblock and Jeffrey Riegel, Stanford University Press, 2000, p. 631-2.

先王用非其有，如己有之，通乎君道者也。夫君也者，處虛服素而無智，故能使眾智也；智反無能，故能使眾能也；能執無為，故能使眾為也。無智、無能、無為，此君之所執也。人主之惑者則不然，以其智彊智，以其能彊能，以其為彊為，此處人臣之職也。[174]

The Ancient Kings used things that they did not themselves own as if they did own them, because they understood the way of the lord. The true lord lives in emptiness, holds fast to the unadorned, and appears to understand nothing; therefore he is able to employ the knowledge of the many. He is wise but has no abilities; therefore he can employ the abilities of the many. He is able to hold fast to doing nothing; therefore he is able to employ the actions of the many. Appearing to understand nothing, being able at nothing, and doing nothing are principles to which a lord holds firm. Of rulers who are deluded about things this is not true. They use their wisdom to constrain the wise, their abilities to constrain the able, and their own actions to constrain the acts of others. In doing these things, they are performing the functions of a subject.[175]

The Western Han historian Sima Qian labelled pre-Qin thinkers Shen Buhai, Hanfei, Shen Dao, Tian Pian, Jiezi, and Huan Yuan as being adherents of Huang-Lao. The first three have been discussed, and the last three have left no identifiable writings; although, the above passages from the *Lüshi Chunqiu*, and parts of the *Guanzi* and *Zhuangzi could* contain their writings or teachings. Sima also claimed numerous people in the Han to be followers of Huang-Lao. Many of these are described as practicing or enacting *wuwei*; most notably, Ji An 汲黯, Elder Gai 蓋公 and his student Cao Can 曹參. In *Shiji* 史記 120 《汲鄭列傳》, for example, Ji An is said to have preferred to maintain his purity and quiescence (*qingjing* 清靜) in managing his officials and the people. He selected (worthy) officials and relied on them, only concerning himself with the general guidelines rather than the details. His approach was that of non-interference (*wuwei*), but was not indifferent to the suffering of the people.[176]

Confucius

[174] This is the emended text of the CHANT database.

[175] Translated by Knoblock and Riegel, p. 632-3, slightly modified.

[176] Ji An's family originally hailed from the state of Wei 衛, and it is tempting to see his governing style as traceable back to a certain Qu Boyu 蘧伯玉 (c. 5th century B.C.E.), who, having been asked how he helped govern that state, replied that he "governed it by not governing" (以不治治之).

What has been – and still is by some – considered the earliest use of the 'philosophical' term *wuwei* is found in the *Analects* of Confucius, or *Lunyu* 論語. Confucius is recorded at 15.5 as saying "One who did nothing and yet good order prevailed was Shun, was it not? For what did he do? He simply composed himself with reverence and correctly faced south" (無為而治者其舜也與。夫何為哉？恭己正南面而已矣). There have been two ways of interpreting this saying, but before we look at them it must be said that there is reason to doubt Confucius ever said these words back in the 6th or 5th centuries B.C.E. The sayings in the *Lunyu* have been *believed* to have been compiled by his disciples as well as their disciples, and probably some of them were. But similar to the *Laozi*, the *Lunyu* as a text does not seem to have existed until the early Han Dynasty. [177] David Schaberg has proposed that the *Lunyu* was compiled out of multiple written as well as oral sources, some dating to the Warring States era, and argues "If the *Lunyu* did not exist during the Warring States period—that is, if it had not yet been compiled, and the collections that were to become sources for its compilers did not yet have the weight of authority that the completed work would acquire—then it cannot serve in any simple way as a document of *early* Confucianism."[178] Although Herrlee Creel believed this saying to be authentically Confucius' words, he could not help but notice that centuries seemed to have gone by before the term showed up again.[179] Although it's possible that the *idea* of *wuwei* rulership was expressed by Confucius long before it took on importance and salience in the *Laozi*, it seems to me that the author of *Lunyu* 15.5 is *consciously* using the term *wuwei*, that is, acknowledges it as a contemporary ideal that one best address. This would point to a post-*Laozi* and Shenzi time period: any time in the late 4th to early 2nd century B.C.E.

Edward Slingerland describes one way to interpret this saying as originating with He Yan 何晏 (c. 195 – 249 C.E.) and involving what we have seen is the Huang-Lao understanding: *wuwei* refers to a policy of letting various ministers and officials "do the governing" (*weizheng* 為政, *weizhi* 為治), thereby leaving nothing for the ruler to do himself. As He Yan put it, "The point is that if you fill your posts

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[177] Many books, papers and dissertations have been published in English on this topic. Some of the more noteworthy are: "The Formation of *Lunyu* as a Book," by John Makeham in *Monumenta Sérica* 44, 1996; *The Original Analects* by E. Bruce and A. Taeko Brooks, Columbia University Press, 1998; "Confucius as Body and Text: On the Generation of Knowledge in Warring States and Han Anecdotal Literature," by David Schaberg: unpublished paper presented at the conference "Text and Ritual in Early China," Princeton University, 2000; "Sayings of Confucius, Deselected" by Michael J. Hunter, Princeton PhD dissertation, 2012; Chapter 2 of Hanmo Zhang's PhD dissertation at the University of California, 2012: "The Author as Head of Teaching Lineage: Confucius, the Quotable Author"; "History and Formation of the *Analects*" by Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Tae Hyun Kim in *Dao Companion to the Analects*, Amy Olberding (ed.), Springer, 2014; "The Formation of the *Analects*" by Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Tae Hyun Kim in *The Analects*, W.W. Norton & Co., 2014.

[178] Confucius as Body and Text," p. 8, italics are mine.

[179] "On the Origin of *Wu-wei* 無爲" in *What is Taoism? And Other Studies in Chinese Cultural History*, University of Chicago Press, 1970/1982, originally published in 1965, p. 60.

with the right people, you can 'do nothing' and yet the state will be governed" (言任官得其人，故無為而治),[180] which is consistent with some attitudes expressed elsewhere in the *Lunyu*. For example, chapter 8.20 mentions that Shun employed at least five others to govern, and 8.18 would seem to suggest that both he and his successor Yu 禹 did not actively participate in governing the realm.[181] In the mid-Han compendium "New Arrangements" (*Xinxu* 4 新序), compiled centuries before He Yan, we find: "Shun promoted a multitude of worthies to official positions, letting his robes go slack, composing himself with reverence and doing nothing, and the world was well-ordered" (舜舉眾賢在位，垂衣裳，恭己無為，而天下治).[182] This is an obvious reference to *Analects* 15.5 and affirms the necessity of delegating affairs to others. Martin Kern has recently argued that this model of rulership reflects the interests of the officials and court scholars, who themselves *created* this "idealization of an emperor who delegated much of his power, followed the advice of his subordinates, and abstained from personal activism driven by his own convictions.[183] Hence we read in the *Xunzi* 荀子 (ch. 11) of renowned kings who were able to "let their robes go slack and yet the world was well-ordered" (垂衣裳而天下治) because they employed great men as their prime ministers. "Letting their robes go slack" or, "letting fall their upper and lower garments" (*chui yishang* 垂衣裳) became a common expression for ruling by *wuwei*, along with the variation "let fall (one's robes) and fold one's hands" (*chuigong* 垂拱).[184]

Slingerland, on the other hand, endorses a second interpretation of *Analects* 15.5, believing it "far more likely that ruling by *wuwei* refers to ruling by means of Virtue [*de* 德]: the ruler morally perfects himself

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[180] The Chinese text is what I believe to be what he is translating and is taken from the *Chinese Text Project*'s《論語注疏》: http://ctext.org/lunyu-zhushu.

[181] Benjamin Schwartz comments: "Whether or not the statement is to be attributed to Confucius, it may indeed be entirely compatible with Confucius' dream of the truly good society. It must immediately be added, however, that Shun, like his predecessor Yao and his own follower Yu, is nevertheless one of the founders of human civilization. Situated as he is between the more activist first founder Yao and the more activist controller of floods and promoter of agriculture Yu, he may simply have represented a more quiet interlude in the fashioning of civilization. He nevertheless undoubtedly manifests his *de* by acting through all the civilized forms of high civilization" (The *World of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 189)

[182] Variations of this occurs in the late-Han *Lunheng* 25: 舜承安繼治，任賢使能，恭己無為而天下治。. Cf. *Lunheng* 54.

[183] "Language and the Ideology of Kingship in the "Canon of Yao"," in *Ideology of Power and Power of Ideology in Early China*, Brill, 2015, p. 151. See also Yuri Pines, *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2009, p. 106-7.

[184] *Chuigong wuwei* 垂拱無為 (and *chuigong wushi* 垂拱無事) appear in numerous Han Dynasty texts and many Han and pre-Han texts mention the "world being well-ordered" (*Tianxia zhi* 天下治) in connection to either *chuigong* 垂拱 or *chui yishang* 垂衣裳.

and thereby effortlessly transforms everyone around him."[185] Chapters such as 2.1 and 17.19 are often mentioned to support this:

> 2.1 子曰：「為政以德，譬如北辰，居其所而眾星共之。」
> The Master said, 'Governing by means of *de* is like (being) the North Star: it maintains its place and the countless stars join in honouring it.'

> 17.19 子曰：「予欲無言。」子貢曰：「子如不言，則小子何述焉？」子曰：「天何言哉？四時行焉，百物生焉，天何言哉？」
> The Master said, 'I wish to refrain from speaking.'
> Zigong replied, 'If you do not speak, how will we 'little ones' transmit (your teachings)?'
> The Master said, 'Does Heaven speak? The four seasons move along, the many living things come to life; (but) does Heaven speak?'

Neither one of these mention *wuwei* but are similar to the view in the *Laozi* where "favourable situations" come to be of themselves (*ziran*), without direct interference or being imposed, but instead are "activated" by the Dao, Nature, or a sage's illuminating presence. In what is almost a commentary on 17.19, Ying Shao 應劭 (c. 2nd century C.E.) wrote that just as the four seasons move along and the many living things come to life without Heaven speaking, the world under the influence of the most ancient of culture heroes, Fuxi 伏羲, Nüwa 女媧, and Shennong 神農, also ran smoothly. These "Three August Ones" (*San Huang* 三皇) "let their robes go slack, folded their hands, and refrained from acting" (*chuigong wuwei* 垂拱無為).[186]

Although there is a possibility that "Confucius" was suggesting that Shun 舜 maintained a harmonious society simply by the force of his virtuous character, the earliest stories about Shun in our extant sources, like the *Shangshu* 尚書, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan* 春秋左傳, *Mengzi* 孟子, *Zhuangzi*, *Rongchengshi* 容成氏,[187] and the *Lunyu* itself, all celebrate him for having selected and directed worthy officials to, basically, impose his will on the world.[188] The focus does not turn to his character until the 3rd and 2nd

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[185] *Confucius Analects*, Hackett, 2003, p. 175-6. In his glossary, he writes that in the political realm, (Confucian) *wuwei* points to "an effortless form of rulership whereby the ruler merely makes himself correct and thereby wins the spontaneous fealty of everyone in the world" (p. 243).

[186] "*Comprehensive Meaning of Customs and Mores*" (*Fengsu Tongyi* 風俗通義) chapter 1: 三皇.

[187] This is a recently discovered text now found in the Shanghai Museum collection of bamboo texts. See Yuri Pines' "Political Mythology and Dynastic Legitimacy in the *Rong Cheng shi* Manuscript" in the *Bulletin of SOAS*, 73.3, 2010.

[188] This included, either banishing, isolating, or executing those who were troublemakers or incompetent (Cf. *Shangshu*, *Mengzi*, *Shiji*, etc.). James Legge realized that the large number of ministers Shun is claimed to have appointed in the *Shangshu* was "the invention of speculators and dreamers of a later day, who, regardless of the laws of human progress,

centuries B.C.E., where we find similar descriptions of Shun.[189] Richard Gotshalk observes that even a ruler with great *de* requires assistants, as there is still a need "to call to his assistance the persons most able to extend his influence by their mediation. The virtue in his own person and his direct functioning as ruler must be amplified, complemented, extended, by that in his ministers and in his vassals… [190] These officials themselves, however, may be quite active and do quite a bit of *wei*-ing. David Loy proposes that "in the ideal [Confucian] administration, the ruler does not personally attend to matters of government but depends upon the charismatic influence of his virtue (*de* 德)," but adds: "there does not seem to be the further implication that the king's ministers do not need to act."[191] Finally, this is similar to the political philosophy that Herrlee Creel ascribed to Shenzi: that ruling in a *wuwei* manner allows the ruler "to supervise the government without becoming so involved in its details that he cannot perform his proper function, and loses perspective ... While the ruler maintains firm control of the administration, he plays no active role in the carrying out of its functions."[192] Accordingly, the author of this saying *may have been* influenced, directly or indirectly, by Shenzi.

Mozi

Although Mozi 墨子 (c. 470 – 390 B.C.E.) and his followers – *Mozhe* 墨者, "Mohists" – were very concerned with social order and protecting the vulnerable, they did not believe that 'less is more.' They apparently viewed the distant past not as an anarchistic utopia but a discordant dystopia; to which we should not *return to*.[193] Accordingly, much hard work had to be done. Benjamin Schwartz has suggested that the Daoist idea of *wuwei* represented a sharp reaction against the striving and

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wished to place at the earliest period of their history a golden age and a magnificent empire, that should be the cynosure of men's eyes in all time." He felt that the *Bamboo Annals* (*Zhushu Jinian* 竹書紀年) mentioning of only two – Gao Yao 皋陶 and Yu 禹 – was far more plausible. (*The Chinese Classics: Vol. 3.1*: The first parts of the Shoo-king, or the books of T'ang; the books of Yu; the books of Hea; the books of Shang; and the Prolegomena, Volume 3, Trübner & Co., 1865, p. 183). Yu, who became the next ruler/emperor, was even more active of a ruler.

[189] E.g., in *Huainanzi* 1, *Xinyu* 新語 4 and possibly *Xunzi* 21. In *Xinyu* 新語 4, entitled "*Wuwei* 無為," Lu Jia 陸賈 (c. 230 – 140 B.C.E.) claimed that Shun was "dispassionate, as if he had no intention of governing the state; indifferent, as if he had no concern for the cares of the world" (寂若無治國之意，漠若無憂天下之心), but that the world enjoyed good order.

[190] *The Beginnings of Philosophy in China*, University Press of America, 1999, p. 6-7.

[191] "*Wei-Wu-Wei: Nondual Action*" in *Philosophy East & West* 35.1, 1985, p. 74. Cf, the Brookses *Original Analects*, p. 131, for a similar interpretation.

[192]"On the Origin of *Wu-wei* 無爲" in *What is Taoism? And Other Studies in Chinese Cultural History*, University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 65, (originally published in 1965).

[193] See *Mozi* 11 《尚同上》. "Return to" is italicized to allude to the common Daoist predilection or prescription.

deliberate *wei*-ing espoused by the Mohists in the earlier 4th century B.C.E.[194] The *Zhuangzi*'s recommendations of spontaneity and carefree wandering (*xiaoyao* 逍遙) were certainly at odds with the Mohist way (*dao*) as well. Although like Huang-Lao, the Mohists envision a hierarchical government with officials, ministers and a ruler at the top, the ruler is not a passive, tranquil or non-interfering one. And while it's not completely clear just what the ruler himself does, (besides promote worthy men to office and reward and punish people) they argue that earlier "good" kings worked (*li* 力) to restore order and harmony in society, whereas the "bad" kings indulged in excessive desires (*yu* 欲) and were "negligent in governing the people of their lands" (不顧其國家百姓之政).[195] As we saw, the authors of the *Laozi* also blamed ambition and desire as a cause for the poor state of things, but they did not endorse the kind of activism the Mohists did, nor advocate using rewards and punishment to force everyone in-line.[196]

One notion Mohists found especially dangerous was *ming* 命, "fate" or "destiny." Although people, most notoriously, the *ru* 儒 "literati ritualists," often appealed to this notion when action or effort was deemed futile due to other factors beyond one's control, the Mohists felt this attitude could lead to simply giving up trying to correct the problems of world altogether, believing that people are incapable of making a difference.[197] Instead, just as farmers knew enough to not be negligent or lazy (*dai* 怠) and instead work hard (*qiang* 強) from dawn till dusk in order to prevent poverty and famine, rulers also needed to work hard from dawn till dusk to prevent disorder and danger.[198]

Although he understands Daoism and Mohism to have some significant differences, Franklin Perkins has argued that the *Laozi* aligns well with the Mohists on the issue of fate and whether action has a role to play in government. He writes that, in the *Laozi*,

> Many passages emphasize the power or efficacy of human action at the political level. Chapter 3 says that if rulers do not elevate worthies or set up desirable goods, the people will not contend, cause disruptions, or become bandits. As a result, everything will be well ordered. Chapter 19 has a similar structure, but says that the people will benefit, be filial and nurturing, and again that there will be no thieves. Chapter 57 says that the

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[194] The *World of Thought in Ancient China*, p. 190-1.

[195] *Mozi Fei Ming* III (墨子・非命下): "Against Fate."

[196] See *Mozi Shang Tong* (墨子・尚同): "Upward Conformity."

[197] See "The Moist Criticism of the Confucian Use of Fate" by Franklin Perkins in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35.3, 2008.

[198] *Mozi Fei Ming* III (墨子・非命下): "Against Fate." This analogy to farming calls to mind Mengzi's parable of the "Man of Song" (*Songren* 宋人) in chapter 2A2, to be discussed further below.

> people of their own will become correct, prosperous, and simple like uncarved wood. Chapter 59 says that such a ruler will have nothing he cannot overcome. Together, these passages claim that it is within a ruler's power to create peace and order and to have people who are filial, kind, just, and prosperous. In the *Daodejing*, it is the ruler who determines whether or not the way is enacted in the world, not fate.[199]

It *is* true that the *Laozi*, and to a lesser extent the *Zhuangzi*, sees the sage, ruler or sage-ruler as possessing the ability to effect positive change in the world. Along with the Mohists, the Daoists would no doubt also be "against aggressive warfare" (*fei zheng* 非攻) and favour "moderation in use" (*jie yong* 節用); they may have also have been "against music" (*fei yue* 非樂) inasmuch as musical performances were excessive and drained precious resources.[200] But, as we have seen, these would be furthered more by "negative actions" or "doing less," than by direct interference of royal decree or rewards and punishments. Similar to the Confucians, the focus for the Daoists is more on self-transformation or self-cultivation, which – *ideally* – has a strong influence on the rest of society. What actions *are* taken are precise and unobtrusive, so as to provoke no resistance.

Mengzi and Xunzi

The *Mengzi* 孟子 is a text purporting to contain the teachings and experiences of Meng Ke 孟軻 (c. 380 – 300 B.C.E.), and like the *Lunyu*, was supposedly compiled by his students. Like the *Mozi*, the *Mengzi* contains no explicit endorsement *or* rejection of the *Laozi*'s *wuwei*. It does, as does the *Xunzi*, implicitly acknowledge that Nature (*Tian*) operates in a *wuwei* fashion. *Mengzi* 5A6 contains, "If no one does it and yet it is done, it is Heaven('s doing) (莫之為而為者，天也); If no one causes something to come about and yet it comes about, it is fate"（莫之致而至者，命也) . Mengzi did not take the further step and seek to emulate the wondrous efficacy of *Tian*, as the "Daoists" did.[201] But he did apparently believe that people can be *morally*-transformed in an indirect and non-coercive way by the (*de*, or moral force of) Confucian *junzi*, or "Superior Person."[202]

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[199] *Heaven and Earth Are Not Humane*, Indiana University Press, 2014, p. 83-4.

[200] These are all chapter titles of the *Mozi* and represent several of the core doctrines.

[201] The Daoist texts usually advocate emulating the Dao – that-which-preceded Heaven and Earth – but also did so with Nature/Heaven-Earth.

[202] See, for example, *Mengzi* 7A13: "The people daily move towards goodness and yet are ignorant of who does it" (民日遷善而不知為之者).

Mengzi's aim was to promote benevolence; primarily in government but also the general population. One famous parable he used regarding how to foster our good qualities is pertinent, and we have touched upon in earlier. Found in chapter 2A2, it reads:

> 無若宋人然：宋人有閔其苗之不長而揠之者，芒芒然歸。謂其人曰：『今日病矣，予助苗長矣。』其子趨而往視之，苗則槁矣。天下之不助苗長者寡矣。以為無益而舍之者，不耘苗者也；助之長者，揠苗者也。非徒無益，而又害之。

> Let us not be like the man from Song who, worried that his young plants were not growing, tugged at them (to help them grow). He returned home, full of fuss, saying 'What a busy day! I have been helping my plants grow.' His son hurried out to the fields to look, but the young plants had withered already. There are few men in the world who are not 'helping their plants grow.' Some neglect their plants, thinking it useless to weed them. Some help their plants by giving them a tug. But this is not merely useless; it is actually harmful.[203]

The approach pointed to here very close to that of the *Laozi* in its approach to governing. Both point out (or assume) the dangers of imposing oneself on the world/people and forcing change. And yet, the Daoist sage-ruler embodies the Dao, which "fosters development, but does not control" (*chang er buzai* 長而不宰).[204] Some passages in the *Zhuangzi* would appear to recommend not "weeding," but not the *Laozi*. The difference, without a doubt, is that Mengzi believes that people will degenerate into animals if they "lack moral instruction" (*wujiao* 無教)[205] but the authors of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* betray no such pessimism. Instead, they see the *Mengzi*'s vision as a *contribution to* the strife and excesses of the times.

Xunzi 荀子 is a text containing the works of Xun Kuang 荀況 (c. 310 – 220 B.C.E.), with some later additions by followers or editors. The text mentions many of his contemporaries and past thinkers. Despite having little good to say about them, it is clear many had an influence on him, as he may have been a student of some of them at Jixia 稷下, in the state of Qi 齊. Yuri Pines believes that Xunzi inherited the view of Shen Buhai and Shen Dao that advocated the ruler needed to select good aides (ministers) to take care of everything, so that his involvement is minimized. Pines believes that Xunzi had "limited expectations regarding the ruler's moral cultivation" and so had to accommodate

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[203] Translation by W.A.C.H. Dobson, *Mencius*, University of Toronto Press, 1966 (1963), p. 86-7.

[204] *Laozi* 51, , 10.

[205] *Mengzi* 3A4.

mediocre rulers in his political philosophy.[206] Thus, he emphasized the importance of picking high-quality people to serve as ministers, especially the prime minister or chancellor (*xiang* 相), and restricting the ruler to the basics or essentials (*yao* 要). He differed from Shen Buhai, Shen Dao and later, Hanfei, in his faith in the worthiness and loyalty of these supposedly high-quality ministers.[207] But similarly, he argues that the ruler ideally is unobtrusive and practices restraint (*yue* 約), rests at ease (*yi* 佚) and "lets his robes go slack":

> 治國有道，人主有職。若夫貫日而治詳，一日而曲別之，是所使夫百吏官人為也，不足以是傷游玩安燕之樂。若夫論一相以兼率之，使臣下百吏莫不宿道鄉方而務，是夫人主之職也。若是，則功一天下，名配堯、禹。之主者、守至約而詳，事至佚而功，垂衣裳、不下簟席之上而海內之人莫不願得以為帝王。夫是之謂至約，樂莫大焉。

> There is a way to order the state. The ruler of men has a proper occupation. As for spending day after day setting in order detailed matters, with the whole of each day consumed in arranging them completely, this is what one employs the officials and hundred functionaries to do. It is not worth disturbing the lord's enjoyment of ease and relaxation over these things. As for choosing the one right prime minister to lead all the others, and making sure that the ministers and hundred functionaries all abide by the Way and aim at what is correct in their work, *this* is the proper occupation for the ruler of men.
>
> When it is like this, then he will unify all under Heaven, and his fame will match that of Yao and Yu. For such a ruler as this, in what he watches over he acts with the utmost restraint, yet all the details are taken care of. In what he works at he experiences the utmost ease, yet he has great accomplishments. He lets his clothing hang loose and does not get down from his seat, but all the common people within the four seas want to have him as their sovereign and king. This is called the utmost restraint, and there is no greater joy than this.[208]

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[206] *Envisioning Eternal Empire*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2009, p. 90; Cf. p. 91-3.

[207] Herrlee Creel examines the influence Shen Buhai appears to have had on Xunzi in *Shen Pu-hai*, pp. 202-08).

[208] *Xunzi* 11, "Kings and Hegemons" (*Wangba* 王霸). Translation by Eric L. Hutton in his *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 105. One wonders, along with Angus Graham, whether any ruler would "welcome being the umpire who never plays in the game," for such a ruler "could hardly be reduced to this state unless overawed by the specialist knowledge which the bureaucrat wields and encourages him not to burden himself with." (*Disputers of the Tao*, Open Court, 1989, p. 292)

This conception of ideal rulership appears in a number of chapters in the *Xunzi*, primarily in 11 and 12, "The Way of the Ruler" (*Jundao* 君道). The only thing a ruler should "toil at" (*lao* 勞) is in finding the right person to serve as prime minister. If he succeeds, then "he will personally be at ease, yet the state will be well-ordered, his achievements will be great and his reputation admirable" (身佚而國治，功大而名美).[209] Or as he says in chapter 16, "Thus (I?) say: the epitome of good order is when (the ruler is) at ease, yet order (is achieved); restrained, yet details (are managed); untroubled, yet achievements (are realized)" (故曰：『佚而治，約而詳，不煩而功，治之至也。』).

Finally, with regards to transforming (*hua* 化) the people, Xunzi did not agree with the authors of the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* that it happens naturally, or *can* happen naturally when coercion, temptation and hindrances are removed. In his famous chapter "Human Nature is Deplorable" (*Xing E* 性惡), he claims that ancient sages found it necessary to transform their own deplorable, selfish nature and successfully contrived (*wei* 偽) and taught etiquette and morality (*liyi* 禮義) to "tame and transform" (*raohua* 擾化) the natures of the rest of the people. As we saw earlier, in *Laozi* 38, etiquette and morality/dutifulness were deemed decidedly and *unnecessarily* coercive.

Notable Thinkers/Texts of the Han Dynasty or, The Chunqiu Fanlu and Yang Xiong

A book from the Former Han dynasty titled "Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn" (*Chunqiu Fanlu* 春秋繁露) is ascribed to the Confucian teacher Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒. The views and philosophies of the various chapters, however, are different enough to strongly suggest it is multi-authored, as are nearly all early Chinese texts believed to be. Although she has more recently softened her position, Sarah Queen has identified seven chapters that are representative of Huang-Lao Daoism and are not the work of Dong.[210] In them, it is proposed that the ideal ruler emulates the movements of the Heavens, and

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[209] Occurs twice in *Xunzi* 12. Cf. *Lüshi Chunqiu* 2.4: 古之善為君者，勞於論人，而佚於官事，得其經也 and 12.2: 賢主勞於求人，而佚於治事.

[210] In her first book, Queen says chapters 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 77 and 78 are Huang-Lao, some of which mention *wuwei*. She writes "The influences at work in these chapters [18-22] include Laozi's emptiness and nonpurposive action [*wuwei*]; Shen Buhai's technique of assessing officials by comparing their official titles with their actual performances; Han Feizi's notion of impartial rewards and punishments, as well as his ideal of a remote and mysterious ruler visible to his subjects only through the actions of his ministers; Mozi's emphasis on elevating the worthy; and Guanzi's techniques of inner cultivation" (*From Chronicle to Canon: The Hermeneutics of the* Spring and Autumn*, According to Tung Chung*-shu, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 186). But in hers and John Major's translation of the *Chunqiu Fanlu*, they choose to avoid this term as they feel it is undefinable (*Luxuriant Gems of the Spring and Autumn*, Columbia University Press, 2016, p. 185 n1, 195) . See

以無為為道，以不私為寶，位無為之位，而乘備具之官，足不自動，而相者導進，口不自言，而擯者贊辭，心不自慮，而群臣效當，故莫見其為之，而功成矣，此人主所以法天之行也。為人臣者，法地之道 …

takes holding to '*wuwei*' to be his Way, takes holding to 'no egocentricity' to be his treasure. Established in the position of *wuwei*, he avails himself of officials completely prepared for service. His own feet do not move, but his assistants guide him forward. His own mouth does not utter, but his master of ceremonies assists him by speaking. His own mind does not scheme, but his multitudinous officials exert themselves to do what is needed. Therefore no one observes him act (*wei*), and yet his achievements are brought to fruition. This is how one emulates the movements of the Heavens. [On the other hand,] One who would serve as minister emulates the Way of the Earth …[211]

Rulers being "established in the position of *wuwei*" (*wei wuwei zhi wei* 位無為之位) is a variation of the *Laozi*'s vision of sages who "rest in affairs that entail *wuwei*" (*chu wuwei zhi shi* 處無為之事)[212] but has been elaborated in Huang-Lao fashion, not failing to maintain that action (*wei* 為) and affairs (*shi* 事) still took place, but were the charge of ministers and officials. It must be admitted that the *Laozi* does not deny this elaboration, for it virtually ignores ministers and officials completely. But the *Laozi*'s emphasis lies in reducing the activism of the governing "party" collectively.

Attempting to explain the now famous claim by Confucius that Shun ruled through *wuwei*, Dong said that Shun "did nothing" because he could "simply (follow) the way of Yao" (堯之道而已).[213] The mid-Han Confucian philosopher Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.E. – 18 C.E.) also took this route when he addressed the topic of *wuwei*:

或問「無為」。
曰：「奚為哉？在昔虞、夏，
襲堯之爵，行堯之道，
法度彰，禮樂著，
垂拱而視天下民之阜也，無為矣。

pages 193-198 for issues of authorship where they seem to go back and forth between denying Dong authorship to accepting the possibility. Pages 193-5 argue *against* his authorship of the relevant chapters and are persuasive.

[211] Queen & Major, 2016, p. 199, 200, slightly modified.

[212] This is found again in *Chunqiu Fanlu* 20: 居無為之位，行不言之教, which further proves it to *ultimately* originate in *Laozi* 2.

[213] *Chunqiu Fanlu* 春秋繁露 4.

紹桀之後，纂紂之餘，
法度廢，禮樂虧，
安坐而視天下民之死，無為乎？」[214]

Someone asked about "*wuwei*."
Yang said: "Who acted thusly? Earlier, in the Yu and Xia eras, (Shun and Yu)
Inherited the imperial title of Yao, conducted themselves in the ways of Yao.
Laws and standards were broadcast and rituals and music were put in place.
Letting their robes fall, folding their hands and observing the flourishing of the people of the world –
This is *wuwei*.
(But) the descendants of Jie and Zhou continued *their* ways, where
Laws and standards were neglected and rituals and music were slackened.
To sit still and watch the people of the world dying –
Should one (still practice) *wuwei*?[215]

In what may go back to a brief saying in chapter 8.18 of the *Analects* where Shun and Yu felt no need to get involved with (*yu* 與) the task of governing, Yang interprets *wuwei* to refer to not imposing one's will on or interfering with the world. Since things were running smoothly through Yao's remarkable governing, they could just sit on the throne doing nothing (novel). But when things aren't running smoothly, Yang asserted that one could no longer afford to practice *wuwei*.[216] Although this is certainly a different view to that found in the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, we acknowledged earlier that the view of the *Laozi* includes the counsel to nip problems in the bud, to work indirectly and, careful not to contend or provoke resistance, action could still be taken.

In conclusion, the thinkers who contributed to the *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi* and related texts recognized that "consciously and deliberately trying/acting" (*wei*) to realize one's goals often frustrates those goals. No doubt they perceived the myriad ways (*dao*) offered up amongst the various thinkers on the subject of how to govern; that is, how to maintain order and ensure a flourishing realm, and yielded to the observation that the harder thinkers, officials and rulers tried to fix things, the more unsuccessful they were. It was as if the world had an inherent resistance to being forced to do things and being imposed

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[214] *Fayan* "*Wen Dao*" 法言•問道.

[215] Translation is mine, inspired by that of Jeffrey S. Bullock, (*Yang Xiong: Philosophy of the Fa yan: A Confucian Hermit in the Han Imperial Court*, Mountain Mind Press, 2011, p. 57?). Cf. Michael Nylan's *Exemplary Figures/Fayan*, University of Washington Press, 2013, p. 61. Cf *Lunheng* 25 《語增篇》.

[216] In his *Xinshu* 新書, Jia Yi 賈誼 (c. 200 – 168 B.C.E.) also complained that when things weren't going well, *wuwei* was not the answer: *Xinshu* chapter 3.4: 俗至大不敬也，至無等也，至冒其上也，進計者猶曰「無為」，可為長太息者此也。

on. Although there are many hyperbolic and idealistic expressions of this observation and the advice to eliminate deliberate and impositional action in the "Daoist" texts, it seems clear that there necessarily will have to be *some* deliberate action and the ruler will have to impose his will *sometimes*. François Jullien explains it this way:

> To make things happen (or rather to allow them to happen, since 'make' is too injunctive a term) is not to seek to impose an effect, as when one acts, but to allow the effect, as it takes on shape and mass, to impose itself through a progressive process of sedimentation. So it is no longer I who imperiously wish for that effect; rather, the situation progressively implies it. An injunction has deftly infiltrated the course of things, where it is no longer detectable.[217]

[217] *Treatise on Efficacy: Between Western and Chinese Thinking*, University of Hawai'i Press, 2004, p. 57; trans. into English by Janet Lloyd.