Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the collection of chapters known as the *Chuang Tzu* are philosophical texts from quite different times and places, written in absolutely unrelated languages and stemming from totally disparate historical and cultural circumstances. The *Chuang Tzu* dates from the end of the Warring States period in ancient China and is, along with the *Lao Tzu*, the central text of Taoist philosophy, a source ever returned to and a lasting formative influence on Chinese thought. While *Zarathustra* prophetically ushers in the twentieth century, it more ominously finishes off two and a half millennia of Western metaphysics. But in spite of these differences, the style of these two texts is so similar and their philosophical content so uncannily congruent that a careful comparison is called for, on several grounds. Both texts have been rather poorly understood, owing in part to the radical nature of the philosophy they embody. Moreover, to place the obscure alongside the obscure sometimes can effect clarification on both sides. As awareness of congruence develops, an idea on one side which at first appears to lack a counterpart may bring to our attention a hitherto unnoticed element on the other. And in the case of these texts the parallels will turn out to be so striking that we shall be impelled to search all the more keenly for the essential differences—an undertaking that will enhance our understanding of both philosophies.

What follows is intended as prolegomena to a wider and deeper study of Nietzsche and Chuang Tzu as psychologically acute philosophers intent on effecting a transformation of our ideas of self and world—and thereby of ourselves. Since no work has yet (to my knowledge) appeared in English in this area, the following paper will stake out the ground, ranging widely to uncover the appropriate topics for comparison, rather than delving deeply into any one of them. Such more detailed work will remain to be done—by these or others' hands.

If the first phase of such an extensive comparison is to stand on its own, its scope must be restricted—and we find a ground for such restriction in the disparate bulks of the corpora of our two thinkers. Little is known about the historical person Chuang Tzu—no more than about his near-contemporary and kindred spirit Herakleitos the Obscure (a figure who will, by the way, be shadowing the course of the comparison all along). The text of the *Chuang Tzu* is not uniform but composite, put together in such a way as to suggest a number of authors from different periods. However, it is generally agreed that the so-called “inner chapters” (which comprise seven of the thirty-three extant sections) are composed by a single author, whom we call “Chuang Tzu,” and that these embody the central ideas of the work as a whole. In what follows, I shall draw primarily from the inner chapters, using passages from the “outer” and miscellaneous chapters (which represent the earliest commentary upon the text).
where they articulate a theme or elaborate an idea merely implicit in the core of the work. Whereas the thirteen thousand or so characters of the inner chapters are all that is known to us of Chuang Tzu’s writings, Nietzsche’s literary output was enormous, amounting to some ten thousand pages in the latest critical edition. Since we have more text of Nietzsche than of almost any other great philosopher, I shall focus on one text in particular, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, since it is closest in style to the *Chuang Tzu*, and because Nietzsche considered it his best work and the fullest embodiment of his mature thought.¹

I. A CORRESPONDENCE OF STYLE

The *Chuang Tzu* is a patchwork of anecdotes and dialogues, often with no apparent order, and only loosely unified thematically in each of the seven chapters under consideration. Zarathustra’s speeches are similarly episodic and yet are held together by a relatively coherent narrative that chronicles his alternating engagements with society and withdrawals into isolation, culminating in an eventual transformation of the speaker’s psyche. Just as Zarathustra and the book’s other characters are more or less closely-fitting masks of their author, so the philosophy of Chuang Tzu is imparted by a large cast of characters, with Confucius as the most prominent—and including on occasion Chuang Tzu himself. As one might expect from an ironist in the same class as Nietzsche, the roles played by Confucius (who for Chuang Tzu is the equivalent of Socrates/Plato for Nietzsche) range from unenlightened straight-man to straightforward proponent of Chuang Tzu’s own views. Both works are supremely poetic and stem from a deep understanding—philological as well as psychological/philosophical—of their respective traditions. The language of the *Chuang Tzu* is of a quality unparalleled amongst ancient Chinese texts; and even if one finds the philosophy of Zarathustra distasteful, it is impossible to deny that the text is stylistically one of the most rich and powerful in the Western philosophical tradition. While the elements of parody in the *Chuang Tzu* do not have the force of or the weight of Zarathustra’s frequently oracular/Biblical tone, both works are deeply humorous—each constituting perhaps the most amusing philosophy of its tradition—emphasizing laughter as an often necessary concomitant of insight into the ways things are.²

Most important of all, Zarathustra and the *Chuang Tzu* are first and foremost works of imagery. This has given rise to a reluctance to consider them as genuine philosophy at all—but such a judgement stems from too parochial an understanding of the nature of philosophy. It is easy (and convenient) for the short-sighted to forget that philosophy, now in the Anglo-American tradition mostly purged of images and under the exclusive tyranny of concepts, began as poetry, with the poetic utterances of Xenophanes, Herakleitos, and Parmenides. Forgetting that the philosophic treatise was not invented until Aristotle, one fails to notice that Plato (although by no means lenient towards poets) himself complements concept with image, argument with anecdote, and frequently, as he
runs up against the limits of rational dialectic, has recourse to the vivid imagery of ancient myth. And just as in Plato the poetic style and dramatic form are integral to the substance of his philosophy, so, too, in Zarathustra and the *Chuang Tzu* the imagistic way the ideas are presented comprises the philosophical import.

Beyond being works of the philosophical imagination, both texts share the same *kinds* of images. The primary source of imagery is the natural world: the elements—sky, earth, fire, and water; the sun, moon, and stars; the climate, weather, and seasons; and the realms of plant and animal. I think the reason for the predominance of images from the natural world is significant; how both philosophers say what they have to say reflects what they have to say. They are concerned to promote a particular way of being in the world—a mode of involved yet reflective participation in the world rather than of detached observation of the cosmos.³

The common enemy is anthropocentrism, the unquestioning prejudice in favor of the human perspective on the world at the expense of all others, and both thinkers seek to foster an appreciation of alternative perspectives by weighting the imagery on the side of the nonhuman cosmos. Their motivations are, however, somewhat different. Chuang Tzu is reacting against the tendency of many of the Hundred Schools which preceded him, and of Confucianism and Mohism in particular, to place man at the center of the cosmos, though still acknowledging his participation in it. Nietzsche has a more serious imbalance to redress, the result of two millennia of Platonic/Christian denial of the body and man’s animal nature: the tendency, encouraged by Cartesianism, for man to identity himself as being essentially mind, or spirit, and to ignore or devalue his participation in the physical world. (The aim would then be, in Wallace Stevens’ words, “the body quickened and the mind in root.”⁴) But in spite of such differences in philosophical milieu, Nietzsche’s later understanding of will to power as an interpretive energy inherent in all things comes close to the panpsychism that informs the *Chuang Tzu*.

Since both Chuang Tzu and Nietzsche are philosophers of *flux* (with the *I Ching* and the fragments of Herakleitos as their precursors), their predilection amongst the elements lies with water, as the most obviously mutable. The *Lao Tzu* established water as a primary image for the psychical fluidity at which Taoist philosophy aims, and the imagery of the *Chuang Tzu* draws heavily from lakes and rivers and seas (see, especially, chapters 1 and 17). The *Chuang Tzu* often evokes water to illustrate relativity of perspective, and we might hear its “A fish by staying in the water lives, a man by staying in the water dies” (*IC* 189) as an echo, from half-way around the globe, of Herakleitos’s fragment 61 of two centuries earlier: “Sea water is at once very pure and very foul: it is drinkable and healthful for fishes, but undrinkable and deadly for men.” *Zarathustra* plays frequently with water in its possibilities of being contained and containing, and presents the flow from lake through river to sea as a metaphor for the transfor-
mation of the encapsulated self, through the overflowing of libido or psychic energy, into a state of open participation in the cosmic play of will to power.\(^5\)

The predominant image from the realm of vegetation in both texts is the tree. The human being is like the tree insofar as its natural unfolding comes from, and psychically mirrors, the interplay between the four elements (in the Chinese tradition wood is itself a fifth element). And as the tree in the form and direction of its growth spans the dimension between the primal powers of sky and earth, so man lives and dies (as Blake so vividly reminds us) at the interface between the upper and lower realms, and between the powers of light and darkness. The Taoist idea of the interdependence of good and evil is consummately exemplified in the section of Zarathustra entitled “By the Tree on the Mountainside”: “It is the same with man as the tree. The more he strives upwards into height and light, the more strongly do his roots strive earthwards, downwards, into the dark, the depths—into evil” (G 47, E 42).\(^6\) It is a law of psychological development for Nietzsche (as for depth psychologists like Freud and Jung after him), that overconcentration on the “higher” pole of a continuum of opposites leads to a toppling over of the psychical tree—and such one-sidedness would, for Chuang Tzu, be like “taking heaven as your authority and doing without earth” (IC 147).

However, the abundant flora in both texts are by far outweighed by the mass of fauna. The most common device in the Chuang Tzu used to point up the arbitrary limitations of the anthropocentric perspective is the poetic evocation of the perspective of a variety of species of animal. Some of the most telling and famous passages invoke fishes and birds of myriad proportions, frogs in wells, and swarms of different insects. Just as the Chuang Tzu contains a richness of fauna unrivalled by any other Oriental philosophical text, so the bestiary of Zarathustra is unique in Western philosophical literature. Not since Aristotle’s magnificent treatises on animals has such a vast and varied menagerie crawled, soared, trotted, and slithered across the pages of a philosophical text: over seventy different species are mentioned by name. Zarathustra’s own animals, the eagle and the serpent (representing the extremes of the aerial and the chthonic), are privy to his most secret thoughts and are far more vocal than he in the second major attempt (in “The Convalescent”) to give voice to the central idea of the book—the eternal recurrence. Although Chuang Tzu’s stories are designed to draw the reader into a variety of animal perspectives, whereas Nietzsche’s employment of beasts is more in metaphor and simile than in invitational anecdote,\(^7\) there is a significant parallel in the kinds of animals that predominate. In both works mammals, while abundant, are remarkably few in comparison with reptiles, insects, birds, and fish. The significance of this emphasis is, I think, this: mammals are the animals closest to human beings and those with whom it is easiest to fall into the pathetic fallacy; it is far less easy to project human feelings and emotions onto creatures such as insects and fish. The relative “otherness” of nonmammals serves Nietzsche’s and Chuang Tzu’s purposes of knocking us off
our anthropocentrism—and yet they both manage at the same time to employ this otherness to enhance the sense of our participation in the realms of the nonhuman.

II. RADICAL PERSPECTIVISM

A major difference between conceptual and imaginative philosophies is that while the former are generally articulated in a framework independent of the reader that can be assented to or rejected at a safe distance, a philosophy presented in images works on the reader’s psyche by inviting the kind of participation in their play that effects a psychical transformation more radical than just a change of mind. Whereas conceptual thinking is predicated upon the idea of opposites (concepts tend to grasp by excluding their opposites), images play along a continuum of gradations and embrace opposites in their mutual interdependence.

A philosophy that acknowledges the relativity of opposites tends to be a perspectivism (how things appear depends on your point of view, your place on the continuum) as well as a philosophy of flux. While such philosophies generally have been less popular than those that assert the existence of unchanging and absolute values, the dynamic perspectivisms of both Chuang Tzu and Nietzsche have important and illustrious precursors. The I Ching is the archetypal work of flux: there, to borrow a couple of fragments (12 and 57) from Herakleitos, “Upon those who step in the same rivers, different and again different waters flow... In changing, it [the ever-living fire] is at rest.” Such a philosophy of flux leads naturally to a perspectivism: the opposites of yin and yang are intimately linked, each depending on the other in order to be what it is and having the germ of the other immanent in; what is going on depends on what has been going on and where the process is heading; the value of a line in a hexagram depends on what is above it and what is below. The perspectivism of the Chuang Tzu is all the more radical since it is reacting against what it understands as the moral absolutism of Confucianism. Similarly, Nietzsche’s perspectivism is a reaction against the essentialism of Platonism and Christian philosophy and also harks back to the beginnings of Western philosophy with Herakleitos. The central, antiessentialist message of both our texts is well summed up in fragment 111 of that darkly seminal thinker: “It is by disease that health is pleasant, by evil that good is pleasant, by hunger satiety, by weariness rest.”

The most general way in which the Chuang Tzu expresses the interdependence of opposites is through the primal forces of heaven and earth and yin and yang.

If then we say “Why not take the right as our authority and do without the wrong, take the ordered as our authority and do away with the unruly”, this is failing to understand the pattern of heaven and earth, and the myriad things as they essentially are. It is as though you were to take heaven as your authority and do without earth, take the Yin as your authority and do without the Yang; that this is impracticable is plain enough. (IC 147)
Chuang Tzu makes the same claim in terms of the relatively neutral pronouns “it” and “other”:

No thing is not ‘other’, no thing is not ‘it’. If you treat yourself too as ‘other’ they do not appear, if you know of yourself you know of them. Hence it is said: “‘Other’ comes out from ‘it’, ‘it’ likewise goes by ‘other’”, the opinion that ‘it’ and ‘other’ are born simultaneously. However, “Simultaneously with being alive one dies”, and simultaneously with dying one is alive... (IC 52)

Here Chuang Tzu is doing two things: he is suggesting that since the opposites “it” and “other” have generated one another, there is the possibility—through seeing how this happens—of their being annulled; and he is also introducing the opposition whose interdependence is most emphasized in the Chuang Tzu—that between life and death. (It is appropriate here to be reminded of Socrates’s arguments concerning the interdependence of life and death in the Phaedo, and of the fragments of Herakleitos—numbers 62, 77, and 88—which lie behind them.)

Now while the mutual interdependence of life and death does not receive explicit elaboration in Zarathustra, the theme runs throughout the text in the constant interplay between “übergehen” (to go over, across) and “untergehen” (to go under, to die, to perish) and “überwinden” (to overcome). In order to go across, to undergo the transition to the overman, Zarathustra must overcome himself—and this he does by going under, by dying away from the self as an encapsulated ego, separate from the cosmic play of will to power. One of his frequent voicings of the dictum, “Man is something that must be overcome” (G 44, E 37), is echoed a few lines later by the eyes of the pale criminal: “My I is something that shall be overcome” (G 45, E 37). And for Chuang Tzu, “The utmost man is selfless” (IC 45).

Valuing

Chuang Tzu and Nietzsche both agree on the genealogy of opposites: these arise from evaluation undertaken from a particular perspective, from perspectival value judgements. For both thinkers, the most common perspective from which value judgements are made is the perspective of utility. Nietzsche constantly argues (more in works other than Zarathustra) that the motive for valuing is control, that we simplify the manifold of experience by discriminating into opposites for the sake of power over the environment and other people. “No people could live without first valuing... A tablet of the good hangs over every people. See, it is the tablet of their overcomings; see, it is the voice of their will to power” (G 70, E 58).

Just as for Nietzsche every being manifests will to power—primarily through interpreting and construing the world in terms of values—so, too, for Chuang Tzu every being has its own perspective, determined by the conditions particular to it. The emphasis may be on spatial conditions (the P’eng bird is so enormous...
that it needs an exceptionally strong wind in order to take off; the well-frog’s perspective is limited by the space he lives in), or on temporal limiting factors (the morning mushroom knows nothing of the moon, the summer cicada knows nothing of spring and autumn) (IC 44). The value judgments may be utilitarian, gastronomic, or sexual/aesthetic (IC 58); but, whatever they are, they work only in a particular context and are, beyond a specific perspective, invalid.

Utility is a value that is especially context-dependent, since things of use are used for a particular function. In the “Autumn Floods” chapter of the Chuang Tzu, the spirit of which is especially close to that of the first two inner chapters, we read: “That a large beam can be used to batter down a city wall but can’t be used to plug up a small hole speaks of a difference in function” (IC 147). The antiessentialist message here is that there is nothing inherently useful about a battering ram: it depends on what it is to be used for. The context-dependence of the useful is brought out at its most fundamental level in the delightful encounter between Chuang Tzu and Hui Shih in chapter 26 concerning a topic dear to Nietzsche’s heart—the relation between ground and lack of ground (IC 100). The point here is that any footprint-sized piece of the broad earth’s surface is not grounding per se: it is so only in relation to the ground that surrounds it.

It is not that the perspective of utility is in itself wrong or a “bad thing”: what both thinkers are concerned to emphasize (and Nietzsche does this with respect to the practical scientific attitude in general) is that it is only one perspective amongst many. The problem arises when we become fixated in a particular perspective, as demonstrated in the interchange between Chuang Tzu and Hui Shih concerning the enormous gourds, at the end of the first chapter. The gist of this passage could be paraphrased in Heideggerian language by saying that fixity of perspective leads to an obsessive concentration on actuality and a corresponding blindness to the myriad possibilities in every situation. Both Nietzsche and Chuang Tzu would, I think, agree that the motivation for our discriminating continuums of gradations into pairs of polar opposites and our taking a stand with a fixed perspective at one or other end is a strong feeling of malaise in the face of the perpetual flux of existence.

However, the phenomenon that most radically relativizes all perspectives of utility is the dream.

_Dreaming_

While philosophers have generally had remarkably little to say about dreaming, Nietzsche and Chuang Tzu are exceptions, and their ideas on the topic are again quite congruent. Dreaming comes up in both texts in two ways: firstly, we are presented with reports of particular dreams, and secondly, it is suggested that dreaming is a universal condition of our being here—that we are always dreaming.

We receive reports of four dreams dreamed by Zarathustra, and they play a crucial role in the development of his relations with his disciples and the world...
in general, and also in his increasingly successful attempts to voice the thought of the eternal recurrence. Part Two opens with a dream which stimulates him to go down once again from his mountain-top retreat and to re-engage the world of men (G 101, E 83); a second dream, in which Zarathustra finds himself “a guardian of tombs in the lonely mountain-castle of death,” enables him to undertake the redemption of his personal past (G 169, E 134); and a third dream, in which his “stillest hour” assures him that he knows the thought of recurrence, brings Part Two to a close by prompting him to leave his disciples and withdraw once again into solitude (G 183, E 145). In a fourth dream, Zarathustra stands “beyond the world” with a pair of scales and weighs it. The world presents itself to him “as if a tree waved to me, broad-branched, strong-willed, bent as a support, even as a footstool for one weary of his way…” (G 232, E 187).

In an important dream in the inner chapters, an enormously broad oak appears to carpenter Shih, just after he has in waking life condemned it as worthless, and berates him for being stuck in the perspective of utility and failing to appreciate “the usefulness of being useless.” As a parting shot, the tree reminds the carpenter that he too is about to die (IC 73). Whereas Zarathustra’s death dream opens up a new perspective on his past, Chuang Tzu’s death dream, in which he is addressed by a skull he is using as a pillow, overturns his perspective on life by portraying existence in the underworld as much preferable (IC 124–125).

The most celebrated dream in the text, in which Chuang Tzu dreams he is a butterfly, has further implications for his perspectivism:9 since when we are in the dream-world it can present itself as fully real and our sense of the reality of the day-world is lost, that reality is put into question and the day-world perspective radically relativized. The story of the dream makes the further point, relevant also to Nietzsche’s perspectivism, that when one is in a certain perspective it is impossible to see it as a perspective. Only when we are placed in a different perspective can we appreciate the limitations of our former standpoint.

It is a short step from saying that we are always in some perspective or other to saying that we are always in some dream or fantasy or other. In chapter 6, Confucius asks Yen Hui: “Is it just that you and I are the ones who have not yet begun to waken from our dream?” (IC 90). This should shake our confidence, he continues, in thinking that we know the true nature of the “I” who supposedly “does this and does that.” The point is made more emphatically in chapter 2, where Chang Wu-tzu says: “While we dream we do not know that we are dreaming. . .; not until we wake do we know that we were dreaming. Only at the ultimate awakening shall we know that this is the ultimate dream. . . You and Confucius are both dreams, and I who call you a dream am also a dream” (IC 59–60). In addition to establishing the universality of dreaming for Chuang Tzu, this passage points up an important feature of his perspectivism and its further congruence with Nietzsche’s. Like Nietzsche, who emphasizes that experience is always necessarily perspectival, Chuang Tzu does not believe that
we could ever attain a kind of “perspectiveless seeing.” What we wake up to is
the realization that we are always bound by some perspective: this awakening is
itself a perspective—but one that acknowledges and embraces the multiplicity
of all possible perspectives, and is thus “open in every direction” (IC 148).

From his first published book, The Birth of Tragedy, in which he spoke of the
necessity for the Greeks of interposing the Apollonian dream-world of beautiful
illusion between themselves and the Dionysian abyss, Nietzsche has emphasized
the way in which deep-level fantasy activity conditions all our experience. While Zarathustra elaborates (and itself exemplifies) the idea of existence’s being
a product of creative/interpretive will to power, we find a more concise presenta-
tion of this idea in The Gay Science, the book Nietzsche published just before Zarathustra. Speaking of his discovery that “the whole past of humanity and
animality” conditions our present experience at an unconscious level, he writes:

... I suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the awareness that
I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming in order not to perish ... that amongst all these dreamers I too, the “one who recognizes,” am dancing my
dance, that the one who recognizes this is a means for prolonging the earthly
dance and so belongs to the masters of ceremonies of existence ... in order to
preserve the universality of dreaming and the mutual comprehension of all these
dreamers and thereby to preserve the continuation of the dream (section 54).

As in the Chuang Tzu it is not that there is anything “wrong” with dreaming
while awake; being in a perspective conditioned by unconscious fantasy is an
essential way human beings are in the world. What is blameworthy is the refusal
to admit that we are dreamers, to become aware of the extent to which the “real
world” is projected by human needs and desires, and to celebrate this creative
activity by both seeing through and playing with it at the same time.

Wandering

It is significant that both our texts, in order to impart a sense of a philosophically
more “healthy” response to the perspectival nature of human existence, employ
the same image—that of wandering. The first chapter of the Chuang Tzu is
entitled “hsiao yao yu”—“free and easy wandering,” “going rambling without a
destination,” or “wandering in unconditioned freedom.” The anecdotes of this
section, which conduct the reader through a variety of perspectives ranging from
the vegetative through the animal to the human, all point up the limitations of
adopter a fixed standpoint. They, and many of the anecdotes which follow, offer
the alternative of a perspectival fluidity and flexibility, a free and easy wandering
through a multiplicity of possible points of view. Such wandering is often
contrasted with a fixed moral (generally Confucian) position of benevolence or
righteousness.

Zarathustra is established as a wanderer at the very beginning of the Prologue
where, on coming down from the mountain, he meets the old saint, whose first
words to him are: “No stranger to me is this wanderer ... Zarathustra ... Does
he not walk like a dancer?” (G 8, E 10–11). The subsequent narrative follows Zarathustra’s career as he wanders from place to place, trying out the perspectives of mountain top and valley, underworld and ocean. Part Three opens with a section entitled “The Wanderer,” in which, anticipating his first major attempt at imparting the thought of the recurrence, and reaffirming his awareness of the interdependence of opposites on the psychological path, Zarathustra says: “Before my highest mountain I stand and before my longest wandering; to that end I must first go down deeper than I ever descended” (G 191, E 154).

The paths of self-transformation in both texts are not straightforward but rather crooked, and often lead backwards or round in circles. They thus reflect a predilection of both philosophers for the curved and bent over the straight and upright (favored by most paths of transcendence). “My walk goes backward and goes crooked,” says the madman of Ch’u, who is generally an advocate of good sense in the 

Chuang Tzu (IC 75). “All good things approach their goal crookedly,” says Zarathustra (G 361, E 294); and at the end of the book, one of the “higher men” asks Zarathustra: “Isn’t the perfect sage fond of walking on the most crooked ways? . . . your appearance is the evidence!” (G 388, E 315).

The word for “wander” in the Chuang Tzu, “yu,” also has the connotation of “dance,” being derived from a word for the way the pendants of a banner dance in the wind and cognate with a term meaning “to dance, float, swim about in water.” We could therefore translate Chang Wu-tzu’s final advice to Ch’ü Ch’üeh-tzu as: “Dance in—let yourself be moved by—the limitless, and so find things their lodging-places there” (IC 60). This corresponds to the dance as a central image in Zarathustra and an indispensable capability of the overman. The overman must be a dancer because, through realizing the relativity of all perspectives, he knows that there is no longer any firm ground on which to take a stand. Every apparently firm ground (Grund) is, for Nietzsche, an abyss (Abgrund): “Where does man not stand at the edge of abysses? Is to see not itself—to see abysses” (G 195, E 157). For Chuang Tzu, too, the appropriate response to the realization of the relativity of all standpoints is to develop lightness of foot and learn to dance over the abyss: “[the enlightened ruler] keeps his foothold in the immeasurable and wanders where there is nothing at all” (IC 96).

Crippling

Both texts are distinguished by a number of images of the pathological, the deformed, and the grotesque. In the inner chapters alone we meet a hag/leper, a cripple, a madman (twice), three amputees, three hunchbacks, and a man “ugly enough to astound the whole world” (IC 53, 64, 74–81, 88, 95). Zarathustra does not harbour as large a cast of bizarre characters, although the foaming fool (“Zarathustra’s ape”) and the ugliest man are significant in being aspects of Zarathustra’s own psyche (G 218ff and 323ff, E 175ff and 263ff). One of his most important speeches, “On Redemption” (the major themes of which—the
redemption of the past and the idea of "willing backwards"—form a bridge between the ideas of will to power and eternal recurrence), is delivered to a hunchback and a crowd of cripples and beggars—by a bridge. Thus speaks Zarathustra: “A seer, a willer, a creator, a future himself and a bridge to the future—and, alas, also, as it were, a cripple at this bridge: all this is Zarathustra” (G 175, E 139). This touches on a central theme in the book—the necessity, and even desirability, of suffering on the path toward self-transformation. “I love him whose soul is deep, even in being wounded,” says Zarathustra in the Prologue (G 12, E 16). While the foaming fool in Zarathustra does not exhibit the crazy wisdom of the madman of Ch’u, we must remember that by conventional standards the overman is bound to appear demented. “Where is the madness with which you should be inoculated?” asks Zarathustra at the end of his first speech to the people. “See, I teach you the overman: . . . he is this madness” (G 10, E 14).

The plethora of deformed characters in the Chuang Tzu serves, I think, two purposes, both of which are in harmony with the ideas behind Zarathustra. The presence of ugliness, deformity, or disease, is what alone gives to beauty, integrity, and health their meaning—and these, as with all opposites, are harmoniously embraced by the tao. And just as the beautiful is seen to be beautiful only from a more or less arbitrarily fixed perspective, so being deformed is not necessarily the drawback that it appears to be—since crippled Shu is able to live out his years in comfort precisely because of his deformity (IC 74). The characters who have had a foot amputated are philosophical about it—“When Heaven gave me life, it saw to it that I would be one-footed”11—ascribing their misfortune to fate in a manner consonant with, though less impassioned than, Nietzsche’s amor fati. Amputation was a common punishment in China, and we should read the remarks in this context about “crippled virtue” in connection with the following passage from chapter 6: “When Yao has already branded your hide with Goodwill and Duty, and snipped off your nose with his ‘That’s it, that’s not,’ how are you going to wander on that free and easy take-any-turn-you-please path?” (IC 91). Here it is clear that rigid moral prescriptions “cripple the soul,” as Nietzsche might say, and impair the natural unfolding of one’s talents.

III. STAGES ON THE WAY

I wish now to set up a schema against which a variety of spiritual and psychical transformations of the self can be understood. It takes the form of a quasi-Hegelian triad of phases, which I shall call immersion, detachment, and reintegration. (Nietzsche imagines these as the stages of the camel, the lion, and the child.) In the first phase the self is “not yet a self,” being interfused with the world, participating unconsciously in the social group and the phenomena of nature. It is a stage of relative innocence; the Hegelian soul has not yet been torn. Then the self withdraws, detaches itself as a self-conscious ego, over against a world
of objects and other people, saying no to the way society has set things up, to tradition as it is handed down. This detachment can take the extreme form of a spiritual withdrawal or a transcendence of spatio-temporal experience towards the Absolute (compare the soul’s ascent to the intelligible realm for Plato, union with Brahmā in Hinduism, or the attainment of nirvāṇa for early Buddhism). In the final phase a reintegration with the world is effected, a return to participation, but now reflective and self-conscious. The self reengages the world without being totally taken in by it. The innocence and spontaneity of the child are joined with the archaic wisdom of the animals.12

Now much of the literature on Chuang Tzu has taken him as an advocate of the second phase, of detached, quietistic mysticism, of a wandering beyond the temporal affairs of men, in constant communion with the eternal tao.13 While there are passages in the inner chapters that appear to advocate a dispassionate detachment from the world, the close parallels so far with Nietzsche should make us wary of such an interpretation. Looked at carefully, these passages are seen to reflect only an intermediate stage on the path of free and easy wandering. Detachment is a necessary stage on the way toward self-transformation—“whoever cannot loose himself other things bind still tighter” (IC 88)—but more important is reengagement, since to keep on forcefully rejecting the world would betray a residuum of attachment to it (compare IC 79–85). This last point is brought out clearly in the following passage: “By abandoning the world one can be without entanglements. Being without entanglements one can be upright and calm. Being upright and calm one can live again with other things [the world]. Living again one can come close [to the tao]. ... you return to become the ‘companion of Heaven’ (CW 197–198).

The idea that one returns to become “a companion of Heaven” is central to the Chuang Tzu. One returns to a participation in the ongoing processes of change in the natural tao. This participation is most evident in the passages in which death is discussed as just another phase in the succession of transformations of yin and yang (IC 88–97, CW 192–193): here the dissolution of the self is expressed by images of parts of the body turning into roosters, crossbow pellets, cartwheels, and willow trees. It is important to realize that this “going along with the tao,” “letting things be,” the nonassertive activity of wu wei, is—as with the stage of the child in Zarathustra—by no means a mere regression to the first stage of unconscious participation. For at this stage there is no freedom: the self is unreflectively involved in the processes of change. The term “companion of Heaven” suggests that the engagement is now active, and conditioned above all by freedom—a central idea in the thought of the Chuang Tzu and an indispensable feature of the wandering dance.

The major question underlying all that has gone on so far is this: what relationship is there between the central idea of the Chuang Tzu, the tao, or Way, and the two major ideas of Zarathustra, the will to power and eternal recurrence?
This question is too deep for me to do more here than to venture some quick reflections into its obscurity. Somehow, the darkness of these ideas tends toward an equivalence. On one level the tao and will to power are the same in being the totality of existence—present, past, and future. Just as for Nietzsche everything in existence is a manifestation of the will to power, so in the *Chuang Tzu* there is a correspondence between the universal tao and the idea of te, or power, which is the manifestation of the tao in particular existents.14 (While te is commonly translated as “virtue,” by analogy with the Latin virtus, Professor Graham translates it, more aptly, as “power.”) And if will to power is what everything is, eternal recurrence is how, the way all things are. For a philosophy of flux, such as Nietzsche’s or Chuang Tzu’s, “That everything recurs is the closest approximation of a world of becoming to a world of being.”15

But let us now try to see how the two major ideas of *Zarathustra* are connected with the principal ideal that the work projects—the overman. The way to the overman, “the bridge to the highest hope and a rainbow after long storms” (G 124, E 99), involves abandoning the egoistic will that is impotent against the past and so wreaks revenge by branding its passing as deserved and all temporal existence as nugatory. To redeem the past by overcoming the “spirit of revenge” is to learn to “will backwards” (G 179–181, E 139–141), to be able to say to one’s entire past, and especially to things apparently “fated” and beyond the range of will power, “Yes—thus I will it.”

Now here we come upon a point where we see the value of the comparative approach in illuminating hitherto unnoticed aspects of one or the other side of the comparison. It is central to Chuang Tzu’s philosophy of organism and to his understanding of the tao that everything in existence is related to everything else. This idea tends to be associated almost exclusively with Oriental thought, the philosophy of Hua Yen Buddhism being perhaps its consummate elaboration, and one would not normally expect to find such an idea in Nietzsche—unless prompted to look for it by a comparison with Chuang Tzu. Now it turns out that this very idea is the link between the transformation of the will that makes possible the overman and the affirmation of the idea of recurrence. The first hint of this connection comes at the end of “The Convalescent,” where Zarathustra’s eagle and serpent put these words into his mouth: “Now I die and dwindle away and suddenly I am nothing. Souls are as mortal as bodies. But the knot of causes in which I am entangled recurs—and will recreate me.”16

If we look closely at the difficulties Zarathustra has in expressing the idea of recurrence, we see that the major stumbling block on his ways towards the overman is nausea at the realization that the “smallest man” must also recur eternally. (Let us remember that this must now refer to the smallest man, the stinking rabble, and the ugliest man within Zarathustra’s own psyche as much as to those in the “external” world.) It is easy enough to affirm the recurrence by willing the eternal return of the “good” parts of the past (whether of one’s
personal history or of the history of the race); heavier and more difficult is the realization that the good and the bad are indissolubly linked, and that to will the recurrence of a single good thing is to will the recurrence of everything bad.

Ultimately, then, the idea of the interdependence of all things is applied to the cosmos as a whole—as expressed in the magnificently Dionysian culmination of the penultimate section of the book, “The Sleepwalker-song,” which Zarathustra addresses to the “higher men.” 17

Just now my world became complete, midnight is also midday,—

Pain is also a joy, cursing is also a blessing, night is also a sun,—go away or you will learn: a wise man is also a fool.

Did you ever say Yes to a single joy? Oh, my friends, you thereby said Yes to all woe. All things are linked together, intertwined, enamoured,—

—if ever you wanted one thing twice, if ever you said, “You please me, happiness! Fleeting moment!” then you wanted everything back!

—All anew, all eternally, all linked together, intertwined, enamoured, oh then you loved the world.

This passage expresses an understanding in harmony with the tao, that which unites all opposites and by virtue of which “the ten thousand things are one.” There is a distinctly Taoist tone to the implication of the idea of recurrence that one is to learn to accept even the most vile aspects of existence and to say to them, “Yes—this too belongs.” But it is on this issue that we begin to touch upon what seems to me to be the central difference between the two philosophies. Whereas the Taoist sage cultivates an acceptance of the darker aspects of existence, the goal of the overman is an exuberant affirmation—“a Dionysian Yes-saying to the world, as it is, without any subtraction, exception or selection.” 18 But let us approach this difference in tone from the “negative” side first.

While the perspective of death is paramount in both texts, and going under a major move on the way to the transformed self, we do not find in the Chuang Tzu the terror in the face of the abyss, the undergoing of the great suffering required for the crossing to the overman, the nausea at the prospect of the eternal recurrence of the smallest man. While in the Chuang Tzu, in the light of the interconnectedness of all things, to attempt always to avoid pain and strive after pleasure would be like opting for yin and dismissing yang—the way of the perfecting man winds through vales of sorrow as well as over plateaus of joy—there is nevertheless more emphasis in Zarathustra upon the necessity and even desirability of suffering for man to become who he is. This difference stems, I think, from the disparate historico-philosophical backgrounds of the two thinkers. With Nietzsche we have two and a half thousand years of Platonism and Christian thought to contend with, which have engendered an enormous tension in the bow of the European spirit, culminating in the radical Cartesian dichotomy that has totally cut off the self from the world and in the Copernican revolution and the ensuing “death of God.” The existential situation in nineteenth-century Europe (as now) gives grounds enough for Angst in the face of the abyss. With the Chuang Tzu, stemming as it does from a tradition of
Chinese thought in which self and world remain organismoically bound together, there is no such abysmal split and so less suffering to be undergone in the attempt at healing.

Correspondingly, there seems to be in the Chuang Tzu less intensity of passion at the other pole, less exuberance. The images of the overman’s fiery solar will and of the leaping dance are more vital than the Taoist’s mirror-like lunar reflections and the harmonious participation of wu wei. While the Chuang Tzu encourages man to emulate the natural way (and promotes an unromanticized view of the natural congruent with Nietzsche’s, of a nature embracing extremes of cruelty and the grotesque), there is a strong sense in Zarathustra that the creativity of the overman is an opus contra naturam, which goes beyond the attainment of harmony with the natural and in some respects works against nature.

This difference in mental temperature—the Chuang Tzu’s cool harmony as against Zarathustra’s friction-generated heat—is less a result of residual egoism on the part of the overman than of a disparity in the degrees of encapsulation of the self that is to be overcome. The self with which the Chuang Tzu was confronted had begun, under the same kinds of pressures of self-interest that Confucius strove to reduce, to shrink from being a relational matrix into a coagulation around a nodal point; and yet the process was not so far along that a great amount of energy was needed to dissolve the atrophying self back into the network of the world. But in Nietzsche’s tradition the self had congealed into a rigidly encapsulated ego, and therefore much more intense heat was necessary for undertaking the alchemical work of burning it out. But the difference in intensity should not obscure the isomorphism between the underlying transformations.

I hope, in conclusion, that the losses from considering these two thinkers apart from their historical contexts have been offset by the gains in clarity about their ideas yielded by the comparative approach. This approach has been somewhat tentative, because it treads new ground; but at least a few steps have been made along the way of the wandering dance.

NOTES

1. In referring to Nietzsche’s works I shall use the definitive critical edition by Colli and Montinari, Kritisches Gesamtausgabe (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967—); hereafter cited as KGW. The text of Zarathustra is to be found in volume VI, 1. All translations are from this edition of the German original and are my own. They differ somewhat from the translation (which I have consulted) of Nietzsche by Walter Kaufmann, Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None (New York: Viking; Penguin, 1978, c.1966), to which I shall also refer the reader. The page numbers to the (same) translation in Kaufmann’s edition of The Portable Nietzsche (New York: Viking; Penguin, 1968) can be found by adding 112. References to the German and English texts will be abbreviated as “G” and “E” respectively, followed by the page number.
References to the *Chuang Tzu* will be to the superb English translation of portions of the text by A. C. Graham, *Chuang Tzu: The Seven Inner Chapters and Other Writings from the Book Chuang-tzu* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), or, for passages not included in this work, to Burton Watson's *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968). I shall abbreviate references to these translations as IC and CW, respectively, followed by the page number. I have on some occasions modified the translation with the help of my colleague Roger Ames, for whose willingness to share his knowledge of the Chinese language and of Taoist philosophy I am most grateful.

2. In addition to being full of jokes, *Chuang Tzu* emphasizes laughter as an important stage on the way: "Rather than go towards what suits you, laugh; rather than acknowledge it with your laughter, shove it from you and leave the transformations behind; then you will enter the oneness of the featureless sky" (IC 91). The most important of the numerous outbursts of laughter in Zarathustra arises from the first full vision of the overman, when the shepherd who has bitten off the head of the black snake of nihilism leaps up—"No longer shepherd, no longer human—one transformed, enlightened, laughing!... Oh, my brothers, I heard a laughter that was no human laughter,..." (G 198, E 160).

3. See Owen Barfield's insightful discussion of participation in his *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, [1965?]).


5. As I suggest in the last section of this paper, Nietzsche's conception of will to power as an all-pervading cosmic force approximates Chuang Tzu's notion of the tao. For a discussion of water as a psychical metaphor, see my essay, "The Overflowing Soul: Images of Transformation in Nietzsche's Zarathustra," *Man and World* (forthcoming).


7. There are also a few differences in emphasis: for instance, the horse plays a very minor role in Zarathustra but is the predominant mammal in the *Chuang Tzu*, and there is a greater preponderance of fish in the latter than in Zarathustra.

8. See, especially, IC 59--60, 85--91, 123--125.

9. IC 61. It is interesting that butterflies appear in connection with Zarathustra's second and fourth dreams. The butterfly is an ancient image for the soul—the Greek *psyche* means "butterfly" as well as psyche—connected, perhaps, with the soul's tendency to "fly around" during sleep.

10. Concerning the role of creative fantasy in constituting the world, see, especially the discussions in *The Gay Science and Beyond Good and Evil*. Compare also my essay, "Nietzsche as Psychologist: Speaking the Depths of the Soul," (forthcoming).

11. IC 64. Many of Chuang Tzu's utterances concerning "Heaven" sound very un-Nietzschean unless one realizes that he uses the term "t'ien" in two ways: in the narrower sense "heaven" is a counterpart of "earth"; but in the broad sense, for which I shall use "Heaven," "t'ien" denotes the unity of the powers of heaven and earth, and so its meaning comes close to "nature" in the sense of "the natural Way."

12. The sage is often likened to the child in Taoist philosophy: for example, Yen Hui speaks of the sage in his relation to Heaven as "childlike" (IC 68).

13. Compare Burton Watson's introduction to his *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*: "Chuang Tzu's ... is the answer of a mystic ... free yourself from the world" (p. 3)

14. While *te* is commonly translated as "virtue," by analogy with the Latin *viritas*, Professor Graham translates it, more aptly, as "power." For an insightful treatment of the relationship between the ideas of *te* and will to power, see Roger Ames, "Coextending Arising (Te) and Will to Power: Two Doctrines of Self-Transformation," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*.


16. G 272, E 221. Compare the stories in the *Chuang Tzu* concerning death as a dissolution of self and body and a transformation into cosmic participation (IC 87--91, 123--125).

17. G 398, E 323. Kaufmann follows an earlier edition and translates the title "The Drunken Song."