

Article

Students Feed Monkeys for Education: Using the *Zhuangzi* to Communicate in a Contemporary System of Education

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*Fill your hands with something tangible... Destroy the
desire for that which is impossible, and accept what you get
with a smile. – Connor Oberst¹*

Introduction

The ideals of creativity and equality are expressed in what the education system pretends to be, not what it is. Creativity in education is the idea that each student is a unique creative individual whose cultivation of his/her "inner self" is fostered by the education system. Equality is said to exist because students are supposed to be marked or graded equally, thereby allowing all students equal opportunity to communicate in education. These ideal values of how education should be are considered good because they allow educators and politicians to develop policies that are supposed to steer the education system closer to them. Furthermore, it is commonly believed that these ideals, though not fully actualized, are to some extent realized in the current system of education in North America. Many students believe that the education system is largely humane, their individual ideas matter, and are judged with some degree of fairness (equality). When students apply to universities (and colleges) they do so believing that they will be considered as persons, equally among other persons. However, the reality of the system of education is far from being either creative or equal. Communication in education that exists today does not reflect the student's "inner self" nor does the educational system foster genuine equality. In reality, the best way for a student to be accepted into a university is by creating the finest possible application, and to do so students should abandon the ideals of creativity and equality.

The aim of this paper is to show that there is a paradoxical disconnection between what the education system and what it pretends to be. This disconnection, when not recognized, can be detrimental to student's

¹ Connor Oberst, "Bad Blood," in *Album Leaf/ Bright Eyes 7* (Better Looking Records, 2001).

communication in education. The focus for students should be on how the system of education works, not how it is supposed to work. In other words, I am arguing that students should replace the is/ought dichotomy that dominates Western discourse with the Chinese attitude of concern for what is (*shi* 是) and is not (*fei* 非) when communicating in the system of education. I will use the “impractical” thinker Zhuangzi to approach this situation in the education. Zhuangzi’s *Zhuangzi*,² is often thought (particularly from a Confucian perspective) to have little if any relevance to pragmatic life, especially life within human conventions. However, I will show that Zhuangzi’s philosophy can be used to describe the paradox between what education is, and what it pretends to be.

Equality in Education (Standardized Communication)

The modern view of education is largely humanist. It puts humans at the center of education. But these humanist ideas only cloud one’s conception of the system of education with how it *ought* to be (or what values it ought to have), and not how it actually *is* (or actually functions). A student’s character may be displayed through creative ideas, unique thoughts, and individuality; but these are easily lost in the communication of education. Communication in education, like voting in the political system, has become simplified and conformed for the sake of efficacy. In other words, much of the communication in the system of education is standardized communication.

I define standardized communication in the system of education as communication through transcripts. A transcript does not portray the student’s “inner” character. A transcript can only show marks and test scores. Marks and test scores are used as a way of standardizing enormous volumes of a student’s education so that it can be quickly and efficiently communicated. Creative projects, unique essays and individuality are all lost when the student is reduced to a transcript. Grading systems and standardized tests do not have room for judging creativity, uniqueness or individuality. Receiving an A on a project or a B on an essay does not necessarily reflect whether the student displayed any creative or unique ideas. In fact, it is more likely that one will receive a better mark for following instructions and conforming to the guidelines of the assignment, whatever they may be.³ Similarly, the SAT test culminates years of a student’s so-called “unique and individual self-cultivation” into a mere number. The SAT test has little room for any creativity; it standardizes the student’s entire educational background. The

² The so-called “inner chapters” will be examined in this essay because they are the only chapters scholars agree were definitely written by the man Zhuangzi, sometime around 350 B.C.

³ This conformity only increases as students advance in education. In comparison elementary school encourages creativity, uniqueness, and individuality. But in middle school and high school one learns the ‘proper’ way to write essays, and the ‘appropriate’ way to present projects. And in university, essays must be written following a certain format, such as APA or MLA, the scientific method is endorsed in almost every subject, leaving almost no room for creativity, uniqueness or individuality.

38 STUDENTS FEED MONKEYS

communication in the education system reduces any creative ideas to a few letters or numbers on a transcript.⁴ Communication in education is not humanist but conformist.⁵ However, students should realize that one of the most important ways to advance into private education, e.g., acceptance into a private university, is by communicating through a transcript. But for students who are not able to do well on standardized tests, whose transcripts may not be very high, there exists another type of communication. Non-standardized communication, which is also highly conformed, allows students to advance and exploit opportunities that can have little or nothing to do with their marks and test scores.

Creativity in Education (Non-Standardized Communication)

Communication in education is quite complex and not adequately described by marks and test scores alone. I have separated what I call “non-standardized” communication in education from the standardized transcripts and test scores. Non-standardized forms of communication in education are often thought of as humanist (creative), and therefore praised, acknowledged, and considered valuable. However, this form of communication requires a high degree of conformity, and should not be thought of as entirely different from standardized communication. Both standardized and non-standardized communication expect student to conform to certain standards, the difference is that non-standardized communication is not always required, and the standards may be quite different, allowing for some small degree of creativity. Non-standardized communication includes awards, athletic excellence, publications, recommendations, essays, extra-curricular activities, student government, statements of intent, interviews, donations etc. Basically non-standardized communication is any way a student communicates his/her abilities that is not visible on their transcript.

Non-standardized communication in education is different from the standardized forms because it considers students more as individuals (at least more than transcripts and test scores do). It is able to be called “humane” because it has a more subjective grasp of the individual than marks and test scores. This label, however, is still a type of pretending, non-standardized communication is not totally humane, the individual is still limited in this

⁴ This is done in both the U.S. and Canada. Although Canada does not require SAT scores to get into university it should not be thought of as any less standardized in its communication of education. In fact Canadian universities often do not require essays, or look at one's extracurricular activities when admitting students; only one's high school marks are looked at.

⁵ Neill did not use a marking scheme, transcripts, or tests because his goal was to ‘form a character’ in his students. In North America today, the common humanist attitude reflects Neill's humanism, but it simultaneously mandates transcripts. It is believed that human cultivation is important, even though communication only happens in a non-humanist way; education is based, not on the student's character, but on their transcript. This makes the disconnection between humanist attitudes (oughts/values) and the reality of the system of education quite apparent.

communication—it can still only communicate in pre-set ways—but it certainly does a better job of pretending to approach a more humane type of communication than marks and test scores.

Universities at virtually every level have become selective beyond a standardized transcript, and non-standardized communication is becoming more and more important.⁶ In fact universities have actually begun to *require* non-standardized communication of a student's achievements, although it is not for humanist reasons, but in order to become more selective. Non-standardized communication in education is necessary only due to huge amounts of similar applications sent to schools ranging from Ivy League universities to community colleges, big and small.⁷ However, because this type of communication is often thought of as more humane, it is also able to please the humanist values associated with education.

Other forms of non-standardized communication affect a student's standardized communication as well. This type of communication can occur within actual classrooms that is, between the student and instructor. This type of communication includes donations (or bribes), expressing the same opinion as the instructor (both verbally and written), adopting the instructor's methodology or interests, befriending the instructors, and any other "unfair" advantages one can take. (I have not included sexual favors, cheating or plagiarizing because there are laws against this type of communication, and it is therefore unwise to engage in these activities.) This type of communication may be frowned upon and deemed "unfair," because it is. Communicating in these ways do not necessarily communicate the student's actual person or feelings, but can communicate a fake or pretend person. Additionally, not every student has an opportunity or capability to communicate in non-standardized forms effectively.

Both standardized and non-standardized communications are required for advancement in the system of education. Clearly, this shows that oughts,

⁶ In the U.S. in general, as contrasted with Canada, universities allow for more non-standardized humanist communication. U.S. universities look beyond marks and test scores on a transcript and consider what extra curricular activities students participated in and essays they have written. Some universities will also consider a student based on their ability to play sports, and even grant them a scholarship to play on the university team. Other examples that universities in both the U.S. and Canada will take into account are: awards, publications and other outstanding recognition of a student's education. From Ivy league universities, who turn down dozens students with perfect G.P.A.'s and SAT scores, to fairly average public universities, state schools who get thousands of similar applications, these non-standardized forms of communication are important. If students were reduced to standardized education only there would be no way for schools like Harvard to justify turning down some perfect G.P.A.s and SAT students while accepting others, some of which are not so perfect. Similarly, big state schools like UMass Amherst, which get thousands of similar transcripts, who have a difficult time distinguishing between students.

⁷ Although there is, as I have shown, emphasis on non-standardized communication, the standardized transcripts are still, for the most part, most important. Before Harvard University will even address a student's non-standardized communication they will look at the student's transcripts. Of course there are exceptions, such as publishing a novel or winning many national science or math awards.

40 STUDENTS FEED MONKEYS

creativity and equality, have only adorned the education system. Like lovely ornaments on a Christmas tree, or a shinny new paint job, creativity and equality decorate education in a most pleasing fashion. These oughts pretend that communication may function in both “fair” (humane ways) or “unfair” (inhumane ways); however they are often at odds with each other. The successful student is the one who can communicate in both of these ways, varying from one to another, relying upon both their standardized education and their non-standardized compliance depending upon the situation.

No standard should be tightly grasped; the student should be able to constantly shift from different types of communication. Zhuangzi, a Daoist, was supposed to be able to adopt even the values of his rivals the Confucians, if the situation deemed necessary. “[Zhuangzi]’s attitude can even imply that one must recognize and accept as inevitable those basic social, political, and psychic commitments, such as loyalty to ruler and love for parents, that are prized by Confucians.”⁸ Therefore Zhuangzi’s philosophy is useful for this project, because it allows one to change his/her attitude according to whatever the situation demands. To examine how Zhuangzi is capable of this I will examine some perspectives that appear in the “inner chapters” of the *Zhuangzi*.⁹

‘Knowing How’ Perspectives in the *Zhuangzi*

The *Zhuangzi* lends itself to this particular project because of its uniquely pragmatic understanding of reality. There are no metaphysical causalities, hidden laws, or belief based explanations (e.g. God) for interpreting reality in the *Zhuangzi* or Chinese philosophy in general. Clearly, North American attitudes are trying to impose ideal values upon the system of education in an attempt to make it appear pleasing. But the imposition of these ideals is, as shown above, partial at best. The North American attitude towards education is therefore at odds with the reality of the system of education. This tension can be seen as resulting from certain fundamental differences between Western and Chinese philosophical perspectives in general,

The classical Western search for order is ambitious: its goal is the clear, the exact, the comprehensive knowledge of the unitary cosmic design and the forces that drive those natural and moral “laws” that structure and regulate the natural human universe. The classical Chinese approach is much more modest; it seeks to understand the always novel continuities that define and give

⁸ David Nivison, “Hsun Tzu and Chuang Tzu,” in *Chinese Texts and Philosophical Contexts: Essays Dedicated to Angus C. Graham*, ed. by Henry Rosemont, Jr. (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court, 1991), 137.

⁹ The Inner chapters of the *Zhuangzi* are chapters 1-7, they are supposed to be the only authentic chapters that Zhuang Zhou actually wrote, see Graham, A.C., *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001).

meaning to this particular moment and this particular place in life's ongoing process.¹⁰

Western philosophies and social perspectives, after finding what they believe to be "natural and moral laws" (which I have referred to as ideal oughts) tend to attempt to impose these "natural and moral laws" (educational values) on systems, including the education system. However, as demonstrated above, attempts to impose certain "natural and moral laws" on systems like education only perturbs the systems, and the desired results are not realized. Furthermore, because the "natural and moral laws" of education have supposedly been discovered and imposed upon education the attitude toward education is shaped by these 'laws' and therein reason for the disconnection between attitudes towards/in/about education and the actual system of education. Resolving this disconnection is then reliant upon forgetting the Western attitudes and 'laws' and adopting a view that is concerned with the actual function of the system; not its intended or ideal function. Daoism, and the *Zhuangzi* in particular, derives its philosophy "from a single imperative to deal with things as they objectively are, not as one would like them to be."¹¹ In the *Zhuangzi* there are no permanent grounds, no transcendent laws or reason to impose. Instead there is "only [the] pragmatic harmonizing of the contextual particulars to see which alternative works best in this situation."¹²

The *Zhuangzi* permits one to grasp the impact that a changed attitude and understanding of the function, and communication, in the education system could have. Like the Luhmannian description of systems, education will be regarded according to what it *does*, and what it is meant to be (or what people often pretend it is). The *Zhuangzi*, in going along with—as opposed to the Western attitude of imposing on—reality is not burdened with the idealist oughts/values that often dominate the discourse in the West. Knowing, according to the *Zhuangzi*, is not a matter of knowing what, but rather knowing *how*.¹³ In knowing how, one is concerned with "*tracing out and mapping . . . productive patters*"¹⁴ which requires realizing the actual normative practices of (in this case) the system. More importantly, knowing *how* is always already according to a certain perspective at a certain time, and therefore somewhat subjective and expected to change with time or place.¹⁵ The *how* cannot be generalized or idealized. In order to take on this attitude, and effectively communicate in the system of education, one must understand certain perspectives in the *Zhuangzi* which allow 'knowing how' to be realized.

¹⁰ Roger T. Ames, "Knowing in the *Zhuangzi*," in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 227.

¹¹ A.C. Graham, *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, 14.

¹² William Callahan, "Cook Ding's Life on the Whetstone," in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*, 185.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹⁵ Ames, *op. cit.*, 224.

42 STUDENTS FEED MONKEYS

In order to know how to react in a situation, and thereby function effectively, the *Zhuangzi* takes on four essential perspectives. These perspectives are (1) non-humanism, (2) recognition of difference and inevitable change, (3) approaching problems with pragmatic "decision making,"¹⁶ (4) and neglecting fixed qualities of the "self."¹⁷

Western philosophers from Plato to Chomsky have privileged humans over animals for their ability to use reason. Aristotle begins his *Metaphysics* by explaining that the difference between humans and animals is that the former desire reason, whereas the latter are limited to sensation.¹⁸ This difference between humans and animals is not expressed in the *Zhuangzi*.¹⁹ According to the *Zhuangzi* humans often disturb the natural order of things.²⁰ The *Zhuangzi* speaks often about man, but does not revere man for his reason, or any other special ability. Instead the *Zhuangzi* comments on the characteristics²¹ of animals and trees to discuss the different lessons they can teach humans.²² This is in direct opposition to Aristotle who claims that he will give no time to a man who "is indeed like a plant," or one who has plant-like qualities; namely silence.²³ At best it would be better not to value any difference between species; including humans and animals.²⁴ Zhuangzi remarks, "His [Emperor Tai's] knowledge was true, his virtue was genuine, and he never sank to the distinction of what was man and what was not."²⁵ Saying that any species is better than any other due to a special capability, such as reason, is like the small dove laughing at the large *peng* bird for the distance it travels.²⁶ Each species has different abilities for different purposes; one species should not judge another according to their own standard; this is foolishness. Humans make up only a small fraction of the world, why should they be able to judge all other species?

¹⁶ Callahan, *op. cit.*, 189.

¹⁷ Jochim, Chris Jochim, "Just Say No to 'No Self' in *Zhuangzi*," in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*, 35-68.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. by Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, IA: Indiana University Press, 1966), 12.

¹⁹ Reason, which Western philosophers pride humans for using, is often laughed at in the *Zhuangzi*. There are several places where the *Zhuangzi* pokes fun at Kung-sun Lung and Hui Shi, two famous logicians; opting instead for a natural anti-logical approach. For an example see Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, trans. by Fung Yu-Lan (Beijing, China: Foreign Language Press, 1989), 45.

²⁰ Fung Yu-Lan, *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy* (New York NY: The Free Press 1976), 107.

²¹ I am substituting 'characteristic' for 'virtue' in translating *De*, due to confusions when the word virtue is used. The confusion is described by A.C. Graham in *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, 7.

²² For example, the first part of the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi* speaks of birds, showing how humans can learn from the natural actions of birds. Similarly, lessons in the fourth chapter, which concerns the human world, are sometimes given from trees.

²³ Aristotle, *op. cit.*, 59.

²⁴ *Zhuangzi*, 41. Also Graham, *op. cit.*, 17.

²⁵ *Zhuangzi*, 107.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

Counting things in the world, amounts to myriads, and humans only reside in one of them....In comparing humans with the myriad of things, don't humans seem like the tip of an autumn hair on a horse's body.²⁷

Indeed, if humans took more lessons from animals and trees it would allow them to act 'natural,' (possibly even more plant/animal-like)²⁸ and as a consequence the world would run more smoothly.²⁹ Clearly humans are not regarded as something special, if anything they are the cause of great problems in the universe.³⁰ Simply put, non-humanism is praised over humanism.³¹ Humans cannot expect any special treatment from the universe, nor can they impose themselves, or their oughts, upon it. The universe is always changing, and humans, like all other animals, must find a way to mesh into it, they should not try and pretend its something that it is not.

The second major perspective to be examined is the *Zhuangzi's* concern with the difference and changes that exist in the universe. In the quotation above humans are likened to "an autumn hair on a horse's body." The fact that a season, namely autumn, is given is significant. Seasons constantly change, one is always fleeting into another. Even humans must recognize that they are subject to change. There is change not only within a singular species or individual, but there is always change from one entity to another. The different perspectives of each entity is evidence to the differences between things. "Everything is 'that' (another thing's other); everything is 'this' (its own self)."³² The distinctions between things are real, although they are not absolute, and certainly subject to change:

Once Zhuang Zhou³³ dreamt – and then he was a butterfly, a fluttering butterfly, self-content and in accord

²⁷ Callahan, *op. cit.*, 180.

²⁸ Through out the *Zhuangzi* the reader is often confronted with animals and trees that have great lessons to offer.

²⁹ The only people Zhuang Zhou actually speaks highly of are the ancient sages; who seem to emulate many of the same qualities that animals and plants have. Concerning the ancients Zhuang Zhou writes: "The knowledge of the ancients was perfect At first they did not yet know that there were things. This is the most perfect knowledge; nothing can be added With the destruction of the *Tao*, [at the lowest form of knowledge] individual preferences [judgments] came into being." See *Zhuangzi*, 46-47.

³⁰ In other words, "while all other things move spontaneously on the course proper to them, man has stunted and maimed his spontaneous aptitude" Graham, *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*, 6.

³¹ Another way to observe this difference in ancient Chinese philosophical discourse is to look at the differences between Confucian values and the Daoist lack of values. The Confucians, in setting up a morality with set values have obviously taken on the humanist view, whereas the Daoist, who lack moral prescriptions, can be called non-humanist.

³² *Zhuangzi*, 10744.

³³ Zhuang Zhou is another name for Zhuangzi, the *zi* which replaces Zhuang Zhou's first name (Zhou) indicates that he was considered a type of master. Calling Zhuang Zhou Zhuangzi is similar to calling him "master Zhuang" in English.

with its intentions. The butterfly did not know about Zhou. Suddenly it awoke – and then it was fully and completely Zhou. One does not know whether there is a Zhou becoming a butterfly in a dream or whether there is a butterfly becoming a Zhou in a dream. There is a Zhou and there is a butterfly, so there is necessarily a distinction between them. This is called: the changing of things.³⁴

Here the *Zhuangzi* displays the difference between things. Gou Xiang, a great commentator/editor of the *Zhuangzi* (312 C.E.), wrote, “*in the world there has never been anything that did not transform.*”³⁵ As pointed out by the contemporary Daoist Scholar Hans-Georg Moeller, “*there are three phases [in this allegory]...first Zhuang Zhou awake, then the butterfly in the dream, and then, strictly speaking, another Zhuang Zhou after the dream. There is no continuous I that acts as a bridge between these three phases.*”³⁶ The constant change of things affects a person by completely changing the person, as the environment changes so too does the person within it and so no transcendental “I” is presupposed. Like the different seasons all perspectives, arguments, and entities will change. Even in argumentation and reasoning there is no standard for one to judge that a truth is absolute; change is inevitable.³⁷ Therefore, the best way for one to approach problems is to engage each situation anew; changing with the situation, and ignoring any perspectives or attitudes they would like to impose upon it.

Every situation is new and should be dealt with pragmatically as it presents itself. As another contemporary Daoist Scholar, William Callahan, notes, the *Zhuangzi* does not deal with problem solving or an “*is/ought dichotomy.*”³⁸ Instead the *Zhuangzi* is concerned with decision-making. The decision-making in the *Zhuangzi* “*is more immanent, tentative, and pragmatic: it does not venture to break the tensions involved in contradiction.*”³⁹ Situations are not to be determined, dealt with or expected to be like any past situations. For this reason the butterfly (mentioned above) does not know whether it is a Zhuang Zhou or not, nor does it need to. In fact it would only impede upon the butterfly’s “*being a butterfly*” if it were to stop and think “I wonder if I am really a butterfly or if I am a Zhuang Zhou sleeping.” Similarly, Zhuang Zhou does not wake up wondering whether he is a Zhuang Zhou or a butterfly. So the butterfly, and Zhuang Zhou alike, forget each other, dealing with only their respective situations. Callahan describes this method of decision-making as a *ming* (明) method.

³⁴ Hans-Georg Moeller, *Daoism Explained: From the Dream of the Butterfly to the Fishnet Allegory* (Chicago, Illinois: Carus Publishing Company, 2004), 48.

³⁵ Brook Ziporyn, *The Penumbra Unbound: The Neo-Taoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang* (Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 52.

³⁶ Moeller, *op. cit.*, 49.

³⁷ *Zhuangzi*, 10753.

³⁸ Callahan, *op. cit.*, 181.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

The term *ming* is often translated as “bright” or “to illuminate.” Callahan redefines this term as a method stating, ‘*ming*’ as a technical term...[means] ‘enlightenment’ [and] is the ability to ‘interchange’ and ‘intercommunicate’⁴⁰ in many different situations. The method of *ming* is then a method which realizes the difference and changing aspects of the universe, and dissolves into them. Quite literally, this ability requires one to switch their perspective in a given situation. Nothing is affirmed or denied as absolute. What “is” (*shi*) and what “is not” (*fei*) can vary from situation to situation if one is *ming*-ing properly.⁴¹ The ability to switch perspectives and *ming* is most prominent in the “keeper of the monkeys”:

A keeper of monkeys once ordered concerning the monkey’s rations that each monkey was to have three in the morning and four at night. But at this monkeys were very angry. So the keeper said that they might have four in the morning, but three at night. With this arrangement, all monkeys were well pleased. The actual number of acorns remained the same, but there was a difference as to the monkey’s feeling of pleasure and anger. So the keeper acted according. Therefore, the sages harmonize the systems of right and wrong, and rest in the evolution of nature. This is called following two courses at once.⁴²

The keeper of the monkeys clearly exemplifies “decision-making” as outlined by Callahan and myself. The keeper is *ming*-ing; he does not claim that one way of feeding the monkeys “is” or “is not” absolutely correct. He recognizes change and abandons his plan, recognizes the actual situation, and acts accordingly. He has “forgotten himself” (like Zhou and the butterfly) in order to effectively deal with the situation.

Forgetting one’s self is the final perspective in the *Zhuangzi* to be dealt with. This concept is extremely complicated. (Scholars have called this attitude “no self,” however the “no self” described in the *Zhuangzi* has very little relation to the Buddhist concept of *Anatta*). I, following Daoist Scholar Chris Jochim, do not think that the “no self” in the *Zhuangzi* is an ontological assertion. Instead I will use Jochim’s words to describe *Zhangzi*’s idea of “forgetting one’s self” as an ontic exercise:

I simply want to credit him [Zhuangzi] with having a pluralistic conception of the person, based upon such concepts as *shen*[身] (body-person) and *xin* [心] (heart-mind). According to this view, in its simplest form, cultivation of the person involves letting off certain bad habits that make life unsatisfactory: ego concerns that obstruct one’s cooperation with other beings,

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Zhuangzi*, 10746.

46 STUDENTS FEED MONKEYS

merit concerns that leave one worrying about the score instead of the game, and name concerns that make one frustrated when failing to gain others' attention. It does not involve believing in but abandoning the (false) self in order that one can discover a deeper and truer no-self "self."⁴³

What Jochim has shown is, as I have also shown above, that fixed attitudes, laws, values, and oughts can get in a person's way when they are interacting with the world. Instead of bringing all kinds of baggage with one's self, one should forget all things that get in the way of realizing the reality of the situation. The keeper of the monkeys, Zhuang Zhou and the butterfly all display this "no-self 'self'." They are all truly different entities; however, they do not let any preconceptions get in the way of their current situations. All three are able to forget that which does not work, concentrating only on that which is useful for the situation they are in. They never attempt to universalize what works in one situation and carry it to another.

Certainly, one must conform to communicate in the system of education. The Daoist perspective, according to the *Zhuangzi*, merely suggests that students recognize where and how they should conform. A student who functions best is likely a student who is like the keeper of the monkeys and able to forget his/her own plan and communicate in conformed ways that are most pleasing for those receiving the communication. For example, if there is a required test, such as the GREs, then the student needs to learn the materials for the test. As the Princeton Review book says, "The best way to build a good vocabulary is to read a variety of good books over the course of a lifetime. Since you don't have a lifetime to prepare for the GRE, you should turn ahead to Chapter 8, "Vocabulary for the GRE," and start working through the lessons there."⁴⁴ This does not mean that the student becomes less critical or is in any way cheating, but rather that he/she realizes the necessity of studying the required materials in the most effective way, realizing that creativity has little room (if any) in the GREs (in the process the student also realizes that there is little room for creativity in standardized exams).

Conclusion: Should Feeding Monkeys Beget Diplomas?

The Daoist perspective presented above should not be confused as advocating manipulative or false conformity. A seemingly similar, yet very different parable about the keeper of the monkeys is given in another, arguably less authentic, Daoist text, the *Lieh-tzu*.

There was a keeper of monkeys in Sung [a state] who loved monkeys so much that he reared flocks of them . . .
.. He made his own family go short [on food] in order to give the monkeys whatever they wanted. Before long he

⁴³ Jochim, *op. cit.*, 68.

⁴⁴ Karen Lurie, Magda Pecsénye, and Adam Robinson, *Cracking the GRE* (New York, NY: Random House Publishing), 37.

found himself in need and decided to give them [the monkeys] less to eat. Fearing that the monkeys would not submit to it tamely, he played a trick on them beforehand:

"If I give you three chestnuts in the morning and four in the evening, will that be enough?"

The monkeys all got up in rage.

"Will it be enough if I give you four in the morning and three in the evening?"

The monkeys were all pleased and lay down again.

It is always the same when the cleverer of two things traps the sillier. The sage by his wisdom get all the fools into his cage just as the keeper did to the monkeys. Without taking anything away, in name or reality, he can either please them or enrage them.⁴⁵

This parable, which is clearly similar to the one in the *Zhuangzi*, is different in one important aspect. Here the keeper was trying to fool the monkeys, claiming he is wiser than them. In the first monkey parable (in the *Zhuangzi*) the keeper is *not* trying to fool monkeys. The keeper in the *Zhuangzi* was merely working with what he had, changing only to please the monkeys; the keeper in the *Lieh-tzu* was trying to take advantage and fool the monkeys. In some sense the keeper in the *Zhuangzi* is more "authentic" than *Lieh-tzu's* keeper; his goal is not to fool monkeys, but to use what he has to please them. Assertive action, which would include manipulation, lies, and trickery, is not advocated in the *Zhuangzi*. Non-assertive action (*wu-wei* 无为) is praised and certainly more "authentic."

It seems that we are now presented with a somewhat problematic conclusion. Education is striving to become more humane, but conforming to pre-set modes of communication—or feeding monkeys—can be done "authentically" as in the *Zhuangzi* or "in-authentically"), as in the *Lieh-tzu*. Conformed communication has no way of differentiating between authentic and in-authentic students. It has created a paradox where communication is extremely efficient, yet blind to students' actual intentions. For example, one student may turn in essays that are complete fabrications in order to please a professor, whereas another genuinely respects and, therefore considers the professors view when writing. In either case the communication could be exactly the same, though one student's essay is a lie, while the other's is authentic. The question becomes, are we, as students and educators alike, comfortable knowing that those who succeed in education can likely produce the same results with or without a manipulative agenda? In other words, the results of the keeper in the *Lieh-tzu* and the keeper in the *Zhuangzi* were exactly

⁴⁵ A.C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-Tzu: A Classic of Tao* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press 1990), 55-56.

48 STUDENTS FEED MONKEYS

the same—in both cases the monkeys were pleased. But the monkeys are oblivious to the keeper's actual intentions. The monkeys do not know that the keeper in the *Lieh-tzu* feels happy that he is able to manipulate them as fools, whereas the keeper in the *Zhuangzi* merely uses what he has to adapt to the monkeys and make them happy. In both cases the monkeys are content, though in one case the goal is trickery, making them fools, and in the other authentic interest in their happiness is considered. The results, which become conformed in communication, cannot differentiate between the two keepers and both communicate exactly the same.

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