Emptying the Soul in Nietzsche and Zhuangzi

By

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Tuesday, 31 July 2007, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.
Philosophy Department Resource Room (AS3 #05-23)
(Moderator: Dr. Loy Hui Chieh)

Abstract: This paper moves through the images of self in Nietzsche's Zarathustra and the Zhuangzi. It is through this double movement of images that we discover the differences in their respective philosophical orientations. Previous work on Zhuangzi and Nietzsche has focused almost exclusively on the similarities between the two whereas this paper suggests Nietzsche’s philosophy of self is more psychologically driven than Zhuangzi’s. This psychological dimension (as exemplified in his going-under) is seen by Nietzsche as a necessary step of Zarathustra’s going-over to the over-human (Übermensch). For Nietzsche,
to find oneself is ultimately to overcome the self and this process necessarily entails going through one’s own misery. In order to empty the self, the self must be overcome for Nietzsche. The emptying process in the Zhuangzi involves a similar process, yet this process is void of the same type of psychological dimensions. For Zhuangzi, overcoming the self does not require the Angst ridden experience of going through one’s own misery, but places the emphases on realizing harmony (not harmonizing through psychological self-realization) and establishes a continuity of personal action, value, and transformation along with natural processes in a co-creative balance between self and other. Although the paper clearly points out these differences, in its conclusion it suggests the double movement of brings the self to the same place of emptiness.

The Speaker: David Jones is the director of the Center for the Development of Asian Studies in Atlanta and a professor of philosophy in the University System of Georgia. His publications are mostly in the areas of Chinese and Greek philosophy. His current book project, The Fractal Self: Intimacy and Emergence in the Universe (with John L. Culliney), is a cross-fertilization study between complex biological systems and ancient Greek, Daoist, Confucian, and Buddhist approaches to self-nature relationships. His edited books include: Buddha Nature and Animality (Jain 2007), A Feast of Logos (with Jason Wirth and Michael Schwartz, Georgia Philosophy Series 2005), and two forthcoming volumes titled Asian Texts – Asian Contexts: Encountering the Philosophies and Religions of Asia (with Ellen Klein, State University of New York Press 2007) and Confucius Now: Contemporary Encounters with the Analects (Open Court 2007). He is the founding editor of East-West Connections: Review of Asian Studies (the journal of the Asian Studies Development Program of the East-West Center and University of Hawai`i) and the new Per se: Journal of Comparative and Continental Philosophy.

His work has appeared in Zygon: Journal of Religion and Philosophy, Journal of Philosophy and Culture, Philosophy East-West, Education About Asia, Dao: Journal of Comparative Philosophy, Interlitteraria (Comparative Literature), Journal of Asian and African Studies, Asian Culture Quarterly, Journal of Chinese Philosophy and numerous book chapters including New Sciences for Public Administration and Policy: Connections and Reflections (Goktug Morcol and Linda F. Dennard, editors), Polishing the Mirror: Essays in Honor of Henry Rosemont (Ronnie Littlejohn and Marthe Chandler, editors), and “Returning Home: The Basho of Empty Soul in Nietzsche and Nishitani” in Continental and Japanese Philosophy: Comparative Approaches to the Kyoto School (Indiana University Press; Brian Schroeder, Bret Davis, and Jason Wirth, editors). His recent creative writing on the bombing of Hiroshima appears in The Arabesques Review (Globalization, Peace & Cultures Dialogue Issue). Among his other administrative and leadership appointments, he is the past president of the 13 state Southeast Regional of the Association of Asian Studies and the current President of the Comparative-Continental Philosophy Circle. A recipient of a number of awards, he was the recipient of the East-West Center’s Distinguished Alumni Award in 2004. He received his Ph.D. in Comparative Philosophy from the University of Hawai`i at Manoa.

His trip to the National University of Singapore was made possible by a grant from the Institute of Global Initiatives at Kennesaw State University in Atlanta, Georgia U.S.A.