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Authors	Dockstader, Jason
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UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Laozian Metaethics

Abstract This paper contributes to the emerging field of comparative metaethics by offering a reconstruction of the metaethical views implicit to the Daoist classic, the *Laozi* 老子 or *Daodejing* 道德經. It offers two novel views developed out of the *Laozi*: one-all value monism and moral trivialism. The paper proceeds by discussing Brook Ziporyn's reading of the *Laozi* in terms of omnipresence and irony, and then applies his reading to moral properties like values and names (*ming* 名). The paper emboldens Ziporyn's monistic tendencies in order to claim that the *Laozi* not only treats the Dao as an omnipresent value, but also as the one value that *is* all values. I call this view one-all value monism. I then argue that, in terms of moral epistemology, one-all value monism entails moral trivialism, the view that all moral judgments are true. I conclude by emphasizing the therapeutic motivation for holding such apparently outrageous metaethical views. The paper thus defends the basic claim that there is a point at which Ziporyn's omnipresence and irony become monism and true contradiction, and that further exploring the consequences of these inevitable transitions leads to the discovery of novel metaethical views.

Keywords Daoism; *Laozi*; Metaethics; Value Monism; Trivialism

1 Ziporynian Omnipresence

This paper contributes to the emerging field of comparative metaethics by offering a reconstruction of the metaethical views implicit to the Daoist classic, the *Laozi* 老子 or *Daodejing* 道德經 (Marshall 2019).[1] It offers two novel views developed out of the *Laozi*: one-all value monism and moral trivialism.[2] The best place to begin this metaethical reconstruction is with the Dao itself (道), the way or course of all things, the way things are (Mou 2009: 44). As it is presented in the *Laozi*, the Dao is perhaps best characterized by the attribute of omnipresence (Cowling & Cray 2017; Banka 2022). In his recent translation of the *Laozi* and his earlier work on irony and coherence in classical Chinese thought, Brook Ziporyn has offered a detailed account of the Laozian Dao in terms of omnipresence (Ziporyn 2012; 2023). As Ziporyn says of the Dao in the *Laozi*, "the Dao is everywhere and nowhere" (Ziporyn 2012: 161).

[1] In this paper, I will use Brook Ziporyn's recent translation of the *Laozi* (Ziporyn 2023) and Hans-Georg Moeller's translation (2007). I will also focus on aspects of both of their interpretations of the text in this paper, nudging their views into novel metaphysical and metaethical territory. I do so because I am mostly sympathetic to their respective interpretations. Also, I use their translations because I feel they reflect their interpretive stances and because they are aesthetically preferable to the many other *Laozi* translations on the market, with Ziporyn's translation offering a sort of maximalist approach, capturing the many often missed nuances in the text, and with Moeller's translation capturing more of the terse power of the text.

[2] One-all value monism represents a novel view in contemporary axiology, while moral trivialism represents a novel view in the sub-field of contemporary metaethics that is concerned with moral epistemology. In this paper, I will treat axiology as an aspect of metaethics very broadly construed. Clearly, axiology is the study of values and there are more than just moral values. However, the remit of metaethics has expanded over the years to include the study of not only the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological aspects of moral judgments, but the very nature of all normative judgments, including judgments concerning all sorts of values. This is sometimes described as metanormativity, the study of reasons, which raises another issue as well, that of the relationship between values and reasons. There is debate as to whether values are reducible to reasons or vice versa. I will remain agnostic about that issue in this paper. Whatever kind of ultimate metaphysical entity the truthmaker for normative and axiological judgments turns out to be, we can address other aspects of that entity that can tell us much about its metaphysical status. I make no claim then in this paper that values are ultimately reasons or vice versa. What I claim will not turn of which entity enjoys more metaphysical priority.

Ziporyn's reading of the Dao in the *Laozi* is a combination and development of two other scholarly moves: Tang Junyi's analysis of six separate senses of Dao in the *Laozi* and A.C. Graham's list of the "parallel dyads" or "chains of oppositions" that permeate the descriptions of the Dao in the text (Ziporyn 2012: 152; Graham 1989: 223). First, this is how Ziporyn summarizes Tang's six sense of the Dao in the *Laozi*:

> (1) Dao as the unifying totality of the various principles in all things…expressed in their concrete characteristics and behavior, existing immanently within them rather than beyond them; (2) Dao as the nameless objective transcendent metaphysical substance…from which all reality emerges, which is beyond all apperception and predication; (3) Dao as named and manifested…, that is, through such terms as weakness, return, mother, mystery, and the like; (4) Dao as identical to De, Virtue or Virtuosity, which Tang sees as a sometimes used in distinction to Dao but at other times as an alternate denotation of the ontological identity and cosmological function of Dao; (5) Dao as the guiding principle for the cultivation of Virtue and other practical applications, in ethical and political life; (6) Dao as ideal or original state of persons and things." (Ziporyn 2012: 142; Tang 1986: 368-81)

Second, here is Graham's original list of 'chains of oppositions,'—listed in two groups, (A) and (B)—culled from the *Laozi*'s many descriptions of the Dao:

> A: Something, Doing Something, Knowledge, Male, Full, Above, Before, Moving, Big, Strong, Hard, Straight
> B: Nothing, Doing Nothing, Ignorance, Female, Empty, Below, Behind, Still, Small, Weak, Soft, Bent
> (Graham 1989: 223)

Ziporyn then modifies Graham's list of 'parallel dyads,' turning them into what he calls "the dyadic *a priori*," adding axiological distinctions that will become important for us below (Ziporyn 2012: 140):

> A: (the Valued/Coherent): Name, High, Male, Vessel, Moving, Full, Adult, Bright
> B: (the Disvalued/Incoherent): Nameless, Low, Female, Unhewn Material, Still, Empty, Infant, Dark
> (Ziporyn 2012: 152)

Both Graham and Ziporyn emphasize that all the B traits are associated with *wu* 無 (nothing, non-being, nonexistence, non-having, nonpresence, emptiness and so on) and the Dao in the *Laozi*. These traits are also associated with the *yin* qualities in the *yinyang* 陰陽 distinction that characterizes Daoist cosmology. However, borrowing Tang's emphasis on the Dao's being both immanent and transcendent to things, Ziporyn interprets the Dao of the *Laozi* as being simultaneously both what is opposed to and exists prior to all things, and what encompasses and permeates them, what is present in all A or *you* 有 (being, existing, having, presence, fullness and so on) or *yang* traits as their true or real nature (Ziporyn 2012: 153). As we will see, my move will be to embolden this claim concerning the Dao's omnipresence in A traits to the degree of making it an ultimately monistic view concerning the identity of the Dao *as* all things and all things *as* the Dao, especially in the context of the value of the Dao and the value of things. This will also entail an exacerbation of Ziporyn's ironic reading of the Dao to the degree of the affirmation of true contradictions, first in an only localized sense of permitted

dialetheia, but then in a fully explosive trivialist sense in which all judgments are true, especially moral ones. But let us first see how Ziporyn argues for the Dao's omnipresence in the *Laozi*.

Ziporyn's favored image for discussing the Laozian Dao is that of the 'uncarved block,' *pu* 樸, which he usually translates as the 'unhewn' and which is contrasted with carved vessels or other useful objects, *qi* 器, the hewn entities that are thought to emerge from the unhewn, as mentioned in chapter 28 of the *Laozi* (Ziporyn 2012: 152-53; 2023: 34). The unhewn stands for all the B traits listed above. It thus stands for the Dao itself. On the one hand, the unhewn is the opposite of the hewn. It is what is left over after the carving has begun. It is the debris or detritus, the "formless, nameless, unintelligible" stuff or material left over after a carving (Ziporyn 2012: 151). On the other hand, the unhewn is what precedes any cutting, the whole entity that contains both the soon-to-be carved tool and the material debris that will be left over. The unhewn is thus both the remainder following any carving and what precedes any carving. But, on a third hand, the unhewn is also what encompasses and permeates the carved entity as well. The unhewn is not the hewn, what precedes the hewn, *and* what follows the hewn, what thrives within and through the hewn itself. The uncarved block is not the carved entity insofar as it is what is left over after a carving, but it is also what precedes the carving insofar as it is the stuff out of which what will be carved will be carved, *and* it is also what makes the carved entity what it is insofar as it permeates the carved entity and thus gives it its nature, substance, form, and function. It is this third sense of the unhewn as what encompasses the hewn, as what serves as its "pattern or principle," that gives us a glimpse into what Ziporyn means by omnipresence (Ziporyn 2012: 153).

Ziporyn organizes his analysis of omnipresence into five separate meanings of the unhewn. These five meanings capture what he regards as the doubleness or irony of the *Laozi*'s understanding of the Dao. By the fifth meaning, we see how the Dao (the unhewn, all the B entities listed above: the *yin*, nameless, low, still, empty, dark and so on) is present in all things, all the A entities (the hewn, the *yang*, named, high, moving, full, light, and so on). For Ziporyn, "B in all cases is (1) the opposite of A; (2) the totality of both A and B; (3) neither A nor B; (4) the true B; and (5) the true A" (Ziporyn 2012: 153). The unhewn is not the hewn insofar as it is the whence and whither of the hewn, its source and end, that out of which it goes and into which it returns (1).[3] The unhewn is both the unhewn and hewn insofar as it is the material or stuff out of which the hewn and the detritus remaining after the making is made (2). The unhewn is neither the unhewn nor the hewn insofar as it is neither what emerges

[3] This returning is in reference to the fact that "reversal is the movement of the Dao," to cite Moeller's translation of chapter 40 (Moeller 2007: 97). Ziporyn has this line read, "reversal, opposition: the activity of the course" (Ziporyn 2023: 50). What is key here, as we will see, is that this reversal is a returning of carved entities to an unhewn source they never actually left.

from the carving nor the detritus left after the carving, neither the thing nor the condition of possibility of thinghood insofar as it precedes both *ad infinitum*, a remainder that precedes its becoming a remainder (3). The unhewn is thus the true unhewn, the truly uncut entity, not the unhewn that is not the hewn, that gets cut into the hewn, that is left over after a cutting into the hewn, that is that out of which and into which the hewn emerges and returns (4). The unhewn then is finally the true hewn insofar as it is what permeates and encompasses the hewn, what serves as the principle and pattern for the hewn, what never leaves it, what constitutes, causes, sustains, and destroys the hewn, what reverses and returns the hewn back into itself (5).

It is with this fifth meaning that Ziporyn reaches his full understanding of the omnipresence of the Dao in the *Laozi*. He summarizes it in these terms:

> The true A as opposed to so-called "A," i.e., the *pattern* or *principle* of arising and returning, the inherent tendency back toward its unintelligibility and valuelessness which is always immanent in it, which determines how A acts, permeates A, makes A A, sustains A as A, and hence is the real locus of its identity as A. A is A as opposed to B only because A is value, and the unhewn (B) is the real value of A. The unhewn is thus the real A. (Ziporyn 2012: 153)

Ziporyn next makes this final point again in the language of truth and irony, mixing both the alethic sense of 'true' as accurate or correspondent and the metaphysical sense of 'true' as real. He claims that the truth of B is that it is the true A, precisely what is not true of it *qua* B. To be the true A, it must be true that B is what it is not, A. This then explains how B is omnipresent throughout A as well. Since it is the truth of A, the true A, B is everywhere where A is. It is this truth, that B is the true A, "that constitutes the 'irony' of the Daoist tradition" and thus renders the Dao 'everywhere and nowhere' (Ziporyn 2012: 153). That is, it is the case both that the Dao is everywhere where non-Dao is because it is the truth of non-Dao *and* non-Dao is everywhere where Dao is because it is the truth of the Dao. Dao is the true non-Dao; "'non-Dao' is the true 'Dao'" (Ziporyn 2012: 153). To steer this discussion towards the metaethical status of the ironically omnipresent true Dao, let us move to how Ziporyn presents these claims concerning omnipresence in terms of value.

2 Axiological Omnipresence

At first, Ziporyn associates the hewn, all the A entities, with value and the unhewn with disvalue. The locus of value is in the carved vessel, while the now-carved block is disvalued as the discarded detritus left over after a carving. But the unhewn block is also the constant value of what will become the valued carved entity and the disvalued detritus. If so, then the unhewn's value must precede the distinction between value and disvalue that only arises with the carving, with evaluation, the distinction into valued vessel and disvalued detritus. If so, then it is not that the unhewn is valued or has value in the way carved entities do. Carved entities are so many degrees of value, all the good or bad tools, utensils, things, and so on. The unhewn is not on the spectrum of valued entities.

It is no mere (valued) thing. But if so, then it must be the truly valuable thing, the true value which precedes and which follows from valuation, what all values must emerge from and return to, indeed what must generate and destroy all values. The unhewn is thus the true source and nature, the true value, of the valued and the disvalued as well, both discarded disvalue and the ultimate disvalue associated with all the B traits (low, still, empty, dark, and so on). The unhewn is the valueless value of the valued then, the valuable disvalue of the valueless. It is the true value of all values, all that is valued and disvalued, because it permeates and conditions all values no matter how valuable. The unhewn is the true value of all values by not being merely any one of them, but by being omnipresent in them all. Ziporyn puts it this way: "The unhewn is the truth about the vessel (i.e., the vessel is taken as the locus of value, but the true locus of value lies in the anti-vessel, viz., the unhewn, which is what truly satisfies the original definition given to 'vessel'—its valuableness)" (Ziporyn 2012: 153).

What this value paradox entails is that the value of the unhewn is present in all values and disvalues, which means, ironically, that it is both the true disvalue of all the values and disvalues which it is not and, likewise, the true value of all the values and disvalues in which it is present. The Dao is the value that is both in and not in all values and disvalues. The Dao is the Value which permeates, which is the pattern or principle inherent to, all value/disvalue distinctions, all the value distinctions *it* ultimately makes or generates, which includes the Dao's own distinction from itself, all the values and disvalues which it produces, permeates, and returns to itself. No values or disvalues ever leave the Dao's omnipresent value because the Dao never leaves them. This is evident from the last line of chapter 28 of the *Laozi*, which says that "the vastest of all structures is formed by the great cutting and carving that severs nothing" (Ziporyn 2023: 35). It is in this 'severing of nothing' that enables the Dao to remain omnipresent in all that is cut and carved, all values, all things. Even while hewn and carved, nothing leaves the Dao, the unhewn. All carvings, all values, are all ways inherent to the Dao, all ways in which the Dao is always present in all values, all things, everywhere and nowhere.

Perhaps another example from the *Laozi* besides that of the unhewn will help us understand Ziporyn's reading of the Dao in terms of axiological omnipresence. In the famous first chapter, the *Laozi* tells us about the permanent, constant, or eternal (*chang* 常) Dao and name (*ming* 名), the Dao and name that is not specified and named, at least not as any mere specific thing or name.[4] Now, what's in a name? As we have seen, Ziporyn includes

[4] Ziporyn translates the first two lines of chapter 1 of the *Laozi* in this way: "Any course can be taken as the right course to take, but no course like that can be the course taken always. Any name can be named to determine what is or should be, but no name like that can be what determines them always" (Ziporyn 2023: 1). Just to get a sense of how else these lines could sound, here is Moeller's translation of the same: "As to a Dao—if it can be specified as a Dao, it is not a permanent Dao. As to a name—if it can be specified as a name, it is not a permanent name" (Moeller 2007: 3).

names in the A group. So, on the one hand, names name things. They name carvings and thus are themselves carvings. However, on the other hand, names are not only descriptive. In classical China, names name normative or axiological properties, social roles and communal expectations, and the reputation or fame accrued for properly fulling these roles and meeting these expectations. Name are thus also prescriptive, and sometimes they succeed at corresponding to what they name and sometimes they do not (Makeham 1994; D'Ambrosio, Kantor, & Moeller 2018). For Ziporyn, names are values, evaluations or projections of value or disvalue. He says that the second line of chapter 1 ('Any name can be named to determine what is or should be, but no name like that can be what determines them always.') could also be loosely translated as, "Its value can be valued, but then it will not be enduring value" (Ziporyn 2012: 284). What is interesting is that the Dao as well could be understood both descriptively and prescriptively. It is a concrete thing in terms of being an actual path, road, or way, to the degree of being the cosmogonic and cosmological way, the immanent and transcendent course of all beings and events, as we saw with Tang's six senses of Dao. It is also a value insofar as it inherently instantiates normative properties, as can be discerned from earlier understandings of the Dao as 'course of behavior,' 'plan of approach,' or 'way of engaging.' Dao can thus mean a purposive activity, but one that, in the *Laozi*, will be the ironic activity of purposeless or spontaneous (*ziran* 自然) nondoing or nonacting (*wuwei* 无为). So, the concepts of name and Dao designate values, and in the case of the Dao designate value itself, but a value that is not only or merely any of the values or disvalues that are named, followed, or rejected.

To set the Dao and names back into Ziporynian omnipresence, we can regard the first lines of the first chapter of the *Laozi* as saying that the constant or permanent Dao and name is the value that is no mere specifically named or followed value or course, but the permanent or constant value that is always there in all degrees of value. Where exactly is the Dao in all these degrees of value? Well, everywhere, in and through all things, values, names, and courses. The *Laozi* next tells us that having no name is the beginning of all things while having a name is the mother of all things (*wanwu* 萬物). What is the difference between a beginning and a mother? According to the *Laozi*, nothing really, considering chapters 25 and 52 describe the beginning of the world as its mother. Also, chapter 1 declares that both having no name and having a name "emerge together as one, but when named are determined as different" (Ziporyn 2023: 1). This means that the Dao's namelessness, its name of 'nameless Dao,' is its permanent causation of the world, of all things, all names. In terms of value, this means the Dao's valuelessness, the value of its valuelessness, is its being the constant causal source of all values, all names. The world is shot through with the Dao's constant value as it generates and returns to itself all values and disvalues that are carved, projected, and named. The way the world is, is thus the way it should be, and this is what we have

already seen with respect to the unhewn. The Dao is the uncut source, nature, function, and so on of all hewn entities, all cut and carved entities, all things. It is present throughout them, hence it is omnipresent. The value of the unhewn is the nameless, valueless value of its simultaneously eternally named value *and* everlasting valuelessness as the source and permeating presence of the valued values, all the things so valued, all the names, all the carved entities, all the entities (namely, all of them) that it generates and returns to itself, the whole world, heaven and earth (*tiandi* 天地), all that is.

Ziporyn's reading of the *Laozi* in terms of axiological omnipresence would be a fascinating interpretation in its own right, but there are hints of something more going on in his discussion of the text. Ziporyn does not only say that "the Dao is everywhere and nowhere," but he continues by saying, "is everything and nothing" (Ziporyn 2012: 161). 'The Dao is everything and nothing' means something quite distinct from 'the Dao is everywhere and nowhere.' The Dao's being everything and nothing is no mere paradoxical simultaneity or coincidence of opposites. Usually, in theological discussions, the entity thought to be omnipresent—in the West, God, the tri-omni perfect person of the Abrahamic tradition—is not identified with all the things in which it is present. God's omnipresence in creation is not his *being* everything he creates, but rather just his being everywhere where he has created creatures, which is, obviously, everywhere considering God is meant to be the author of existence and creator of spacetime and all that occupies all its regions.[5] Fortunately, Daoist omnipresence is not as nearly beset by the many problems Western theologians have had to wrestle with in relation to God, like the problems of simplicity (how can something that is indivisible, God, be in multiple regions of space?), multilocation (how can something simultaneously occupy distinct regions of space without contradiction?), containment (how can something limitless be contained in a region?), timelessness (how could something atemporal be in a region of space?), incorporeality (how could something without a body be in a region of space?), and co-location (how could two different things occupy the same region?) (Hudson 2009: 205). All the contradictions that these questions are anxious to avoid are happily affirmed in the *Laozi* as true. We will return to the issue of true contradictions in the last section.

Another reason why Daoism is not as troubled by these problems is likely because the Dao is not a perfect person. Also, if Ziporyn is right about the Dao being everything and nothing, then it is not truly distinct from the things, everything, in which it is present. The Dao *is* everything it is in. Everything in the Dao *is* it. This is likely the full entailment of the cutting that severs nothing: things remain in the Dao and the Dao in them precisely

[5] For some Biblical references for this, see Jeremiah 23: 24 ('Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord.') and Acts 17:27-8 ('God…is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being.'').

because they *are* the Dao, all the ways it is so. In Western debates about omnipresence, this is closer to a pantheistic supersubstantivalist view in which God is numerically identical to spacetime, especially as it is sometimes attributed to a figure like Spinoza, though Spinoza never described God as omnipresent and his God is rarely described in those terms in Spinoza scholarship. Regardless, what is key here is that the concept of omnipresence is slipping into the concept of monism. If something is everything and nothing, then it is certainly one thing, *the* one thing, that all things are in some to-be-specified way, either as dependent upon or simply identical to the one thing. In terms of value, if Laozian omnipresence is really a theory of a monistic Dao, as Ziporyn seems to intimate, then there is going to be only one value to which all values and disvalues are identical. Developing Ziporyn's comments then, the Daoism of the *Laozi* offers some sort of value monism. In what follows, I discern which sort of value monism we find hinted at in Ziporyn's interpretation of the *Laozi* and explicate the full metaethical implications of just such a novel form of value monism.

3 One-All Monism

The first point to make is that it is not a radical or novel thought to view the Daoism of the *Laozi*, or Daoism in general, as containing a monism (Lai 2008: 93). The issue is discerning what kind of monism it offers, which is the aim of this section. Moeller has read the *Laozi* in monistic terms. He tells us that "as a numerical symbol, 'one' or 'oneness' stands for the Dao" (Moeller 2007: 94). He emphasizes that the image of the wheel from chapter 11, with "thirty spokes united in one hub," is representative of the *Laozi*'s monist metaphysics (Moeller 2007: 27). Moeller sees the hub of the wheel as being identified with all the B or *wu* 無 traits and the spokes with all the A or *you* 有 traits. In Ziporyn's terms, we could say the hub is the opposite of the spokes (1), the totality of the hub and spokes (2), neither, and thus more than, the hub and spokes (3), the true hub (4), and thus the true spokes (5). In other words, the hub is the Dao which is the wheel which is not merely the hub, but the hub and the spokes, the true spokes *qua* the hub *qua* the wheel. The Dao itself, the wheel, is both an affirmation of the absolute oneness of B *and* the absolute plurality of A. This dynamic is found in the Dao's generative power as well. The Dao is one wheel whose self-causally generative power is expressed in both its constantly or permanently still namelessly named valueless centrality (*qua* hub) and its infinitely moving named and valued plurality as all the ways it eternally generates, destroys, and returns to itself (*qua* spokes). The hub is the non-thing the Dao is only insofar as it also all the spokes it remains present to and ultimately exists as, as all the things it produces and destroys, all the ways it functions in and through all that it carves itself into without ever severing what it thereby cuts. Moeller reaches similar conclusions to Ziporyn concerning the Laozian Dao's omnipresence, and he likewise has his notion of omnipresence drift into monism:

> Although the 'absolute' opposite constituents of hub/spokes…never change their differing roles, they still form a single and indivisible unit. The hub represents the inner unity of the wheel. It unites the spokes and is the pivot for all 'contradictory' movement. Insofar as the Dao can be identified as the empty center or the hub, it contains nothing. Since there is nothing within it, it is the smallest of all things. But insofar as the Dao can also be identified with everything that is going on, or in the image of Laozi 11, with the whole wheel, there is nothing that does not take part in its movement. Being all-inclusive, the Dao is of the greatest extension. The Dao, as both the inner and greater unity of all perfect happenings, is nowhere and everywhere at the same time. It is both the hub and the wheel. (Moeller 2004: 33)

In other words, by being everywhere and nowhere, the Dao is everything and nothing. Ziporyn and Moeller agree on this point.

Moeller likewise reads chapter 42 of the *Laozi* as providing a description of the Dao as both an indivisible oneness and an absolutely plurality. This chapter notoriously tells us that

> The Dao generates Oneness. Oneness generates Twoness. Twoness generates Threeness. Threeness generates the ten thousand things. The ten thousand things; carrying Yin, embracing Yang—blending Qi to create harmony. (Moeller 2007: 103)[6]

Moeller does not read this story of generation diachronically or sequentially in any literal temporal sense. Contrary to Tongdong Bai's reading as well, neither Moeller nor Ziporyn offer, in their final analysis, a layered or hierarchical vision of the metaphysical priority of *wu* over *you* in the *Laozi* (Bai 2008). Rather, all generation and return is always eternally, spontaneously, naturally happening. The Dao is one constant process of continuous and indivisible self-causal generation and return of and as all things. Moeller writes, "That which generates the generated is itself part of the monistic circle of generation" (Moeller 2007: 96). Indeed, B and A traits appear mutually self- and other-generating considering chapter 2 of the *Laozi* tells us that "presence and nonpresence generate each other" (Moeller 2007: 7). The Dao, then, is the whole self-causally and mutually generative wheel, both the self- and other-generating hub and the self- and other-generating spokes. The one is the permanent production and destruction of all as all, of each as each, of each as all, and all as each. All are each the permanent production and destruction of the one as the one, the one that is all. Moeller again writes,

> At the center of the process of generation is the Dao which is identified with nothingness (*wu*) or emptiness as well as with the number one (note: not zero) that stands for both singleness and totality. Explained with the help of the image of the wheel, the Dao is both the empty and single hub (the inward center and 'origin" of the wheel's function) as well as the whole wheel (the outward totality of all that happens or the monistic cosmos). …This oneness and twoness together constitute the threeness that stands for the multiplicity of the ten thousand things. Seen as a totality, the Dao is one, but its oneness is just the frame of a fundamental twoness that is at the heart of change and reproduction." (Moeller 2007: 100)

[6] Ziporyn's poetic rendering of these same lines shows how interpretative similarity can be found even in rather divergent translations: "The course generates continuities. Continuities generate polarities. Polarities generate triplicities. Triplicities generate the ten thousand things. All the ten thousand things bear the darkness of shadow on their backs as they hug the brightness of sunlight to their breasts—and in the intermingling of these two energies all their harmonies are formed." (Ziporyn 2023: 53)

Just as with Ziporyn's reading of omnipresence, I would embolden Moeller's claim of monistic oneness here from being merely a frame to its being the very nature and essence of each thing that exists. The Dao is not only the frame but everything within it as well, not only the whole, but the whole which is each and every one of its parts, which means each part is also the whole Dao, both all the parts that are the whole and each part that is all the parts, the whole Dao. Each wave is the whole ocean which is every wave.

This brings us to a discussion of the role of mereology (the study of the relations between parts and wholes) in contemporary debates in metaphysics about monism. I have already hinted at the view I think we find implicit in the *Laozi*, which I will call 'one-all monism.' The Laozian view of reality resembles Megan Wallace's (2011), and at times Donald Baxter's (1988), strong composition as, or many-one, identity view that says the parts of a whole are, taken together, identical to the whole they compose. With the reading of the *Laozi* on offer here, however, what we have is something closer to perhaps a strongest conceivable composition as, or many-one, identity view insofar as it is not merely the parts taken collectively that are identical to the whole, but each and every part taken individually that is identical to the whole. There is only one concrete particular, the whole, and each individual concrete particular of the absolute infinity of them that composes that one concrete particular *is* that one concrete particular, the whole. This could be called 'one-all identity' instead of merely 'many-one' identity. In terms of the recent debate over metaphysical monism, the *Laozi* offers another intensified and modified view. In opposition to both Jonathan Schaffer's (2010) priority monism, where the whole universe is metaphysically prior to its parts that irreflexively and asymmetrically depend upon it, and Terry Horgan and Matjaž Portč's (2008) existence monism, where only the whole exists without any parts at all, Laozian monism would have to be called something like 'one-all monism,' where the whole universe is one thing that is reflexively and symmetrically identical to each one of its parts. Each part of the universe, whatever it may be, is the whole universe and vice versa. Each thing is the Dao and the Dao is each thing. The Dao is not merely any one thing opposed to or in relation to another, hence its status as nothing, not a mere thing. But it is also each thing insofar as each is all things, each part is the whole, all the other parts that along with it are the whole. This is what the Dao's being everything and nothing fully entails.

Rafał Banka has recently provided a few excellent mereological analyses of the *Laozi* as well (2018; 2022; 2023). Where his view differs from the one offered here is in his claim that A or *you* traits exhibit restricted composition while B or *wu* traits, the Dao, exhibit unrestricted composition. This is mostly because, for Banka, the Dao eternally contains infinitely unrealized or unactualized forms only a portion of which are eventually actualized in the temporal generation of A traits. By contrast, insofar as I am claiming that *wu* and *you* traits are

discernibly identical—to borrow another of Baxter's ideas describing many-one identity: 'the discernibility of identicals' (1999)—I am thus ascribing unrestricted composition, or mereological universalism, to all things. This entails that all entities, both the Dao and all things, are actual, that the Dao is not some reservoir of unrealized potentialities that far exceeds the actual world, but rather that all there is to the Dao's infinity *is* the actual infinity of all the A traits, and that the Dao's eternity or constancy is its permanent temporal emergence and decay of and as all things. This might make my view incoherent or self-contradictory in strictly logical terms, but that is something I happily affirm in section 5, as we will see below, because the *Laozi's* trivialism follows from its one-all monism. While not claiming to be offering as sophisticated an analysis of the *Laozi*'s latent mereology as Banka has, what I am claiming is that if one works out the *Laozi*'s mereology starting from an analysis of its monism, then one will likely reach a different conclusion, one that emphasizes a kind of strong actualism that entails the Dao must be all the A traits it ultimately generates, differentiates, and returns to itself without any of them having left. Such a strong actualism allows each actual thing to be the one actual thing that it is, the one thing that all things are, the Dao, the eternally and infinitely actual thing that is all things.

4 One-All Value Monism

Now that we have a better idea of the *Laozi*'s one-all monism, we can address this view in terms of its axiological and metaethical import. In terms of value, one-all monism is a one-all value monism. There is debate in axiology concerning value monism and value pluralism. It is not, strictly speaking, a debate about how many values there are, but about whether there is only one ultimate, intrinsic value (Schroeder 2021; Mason 2023). Both value monism and value pluralism admit there are a plurality of values. What they debate is whether one of them is the ultimate, intrinsic value to which all the other values serve as the instruments for its fulfilment. In these exact terms, the *Laozi* has little specifically to say. However, following certain readings of the *Laozi*, one of which we will discuss below, we can interpret the Dao as being the ultimate, intrinsic value: the Good. On the other hand, if an amplified and combined version of Ziporyn's omnipresence and Moeller's monism gives us a one-all monism as the correct view of the *Laozi*'s metaphysics, then it will not make sense to view all A and *you* traits as merely instrumental values for the fulfilment of the Dao's ultimate value. Rather, each and every thing or value will have to be the ultimate value of the Dao. In other words, each spoke, each carving, each value, *is* the ultimate value of the hub, the unhewn, the Dao and vice versa. This would also mean that not only is every value the instrumental value for the fulfilment of the ultimate value of the Dao, but each value is both ultimately instrumentally and ultimately ultimately valuable as the Dao. If B is true A, then the valueless value of the Dao will be the true value of each valued and disvalued value and disvalue. So, a one-all value monism will not say that all value ultimately

reduces to a single property (like happiness or pleasure, say), but that all value is ultimately the same value, which is all the different values and disvalues. John Richardson has recently written somewhat similarly of Nietzsche's metaethics that, for Nietzsche, "all of life is good, and the bad is only a form of the good" (Richardson 2020: 355). Yet, while close, this would only be half-true for the Laozi, for according to one-all value monism not only is all life good and the bad only a form of the good, but also that all life is bad and the good is only a form of the bad as well. It is important to keep in mind that the Dao is also the disvalued detritus, the useless debris after a carving, and that if the Dao is all carvings, all names, then all carvings are this disvalued detritus as well. Of course, on the other hand, given the final, more positive statement concerning the Dao's being the true A, it is better to speak of it as the good which is all forms of good and bad, what all values ultimately are, all values and disvalues.

If it was not entirely controversial to read the *Laozi* as offering a monism, then it is likely just as non-controversial to read the *Laozi* as offering a form of value monism as well. In the introduction to a recent collection on *The Oneness Hypothesis*, we read that "Daoism is another of the several East Asian traditions that maintain the world is a grand interconnected whole, with each and every aspect enjoying the same moral status" (Ivanhoe, Flanagan, Harrison, Sarkissian, & Schwitzgebel 2018: 3). Again, the key here is in discerning what is meant by 'same moral status.' Chung-Ying Cheng has read the 'onto-ethics' of the *Laozi* in similar terms, and so has something essential to say about moral status in the *Laozi*. By 'onto-ethics,' Cheng seems to mean something like a strong form of moral naturalism, stronger than even the usual Aristotelian moral naturalism that grounds most virtue ethics in the West, whereby moral properties are grounded in natural yet normative and telic properties.[7] In the *Laozi*, according to Cheng, moral facts or properties, and indeed all values, are rooted in and explained by the cosmogonic and cosmological Dao and its power (*de* 德) (Cheng 2004: 166). Cheng focuses on the role of *shan* 善, which can mean 'good,' 'goodness,' 'the good,' but also 'skill' and 'skilful' in the sense of 'being good at' something. Cheng emphasizes that the good person taps into and ultimately becomes the Dao's goodness, the good that is the Dao's spontaneous eternal self-generation. The way the good person does this is by having their non-action (*wuwei*) be the expression of the Dao's spontaneity (*ziran*).

[7] The reading of the *Laozi* as offering a robust kind of metaethical realism in the form of a moral naturalism appears to be the common or received view in the scholarship. It is found in some form or another in Xiaogan Liu (1999: 211-238), JeeLoo Liu (2003: 282), Karyn Lai (2006: 83-105), and Tao Jiang (2021: 212-223), among others. It is hard to discern, however, whether scholars of the *Laozi* view the text's moral naturalism in a reductive or non-reductive manner, that is, whether they think, for the *Laozi*, moral facts or values are natural facts reducible to other more basic natural facts or are already irreducible natural facts themselves. One gets the sense of a latent preference for the latter reading. Either way, while true, reading the *Laozi* in terms of moral naturalism remains only part of the story. The *Laozi*'s moral realism is more robust than moral naturalism, which, as we will see, remains only a partial success theory.

Cheng develops his reading of values in the *Laozi* by focusing on chapter 2 where value distinctions between beauty and ugliness, good and bad, are said to follow from knowledge of beauty and the good: "Everybody knows what is good. Thus there is that which is not good" (Moeller 2007: 7). Cheng takes this to mean that the true good of the Dao will not be found in the distinction between good and bad, in the naming of value or disvalue. Rather, true good permanently, namelessly precedes the distinction into good and bad. There is thus a meta-distinction between dependent and relative goods and bads based on distinctions and names and a good, *the* good, an independent and absolute good, based on its own spontaneous and natural namelessness, its permanent precedence (Cheng 2004: 168). This latter good is the Dao, the Dao's good, the Dao as the Good. Cheng sees chapter 8's discussion of "the highest good" being "like water" as emblematic of the Dao's absolute and independent goodness because water is "so deft, so good at benefiting things by never competing with them, by putting itself where none want to go" (Ziporyn 2023: 9). Cheng next describes the Dao as the good, and the good person who embodies and non-acts in accordance with it, in these terms:

> What is important is that the supreme or absolute goodness is inherent in the *dao* and hence can be found in a person if the person follows the *dao*. As an inherent quality of a person, the good comes out from the action of the person without having the person first to make a distinction between good and bad. The absolute goodness is natural and essential to the *dao* and one may even say that it is part of the naturalness of the movement of the *dao* just as what is manifested from water is part of the naturalness of the movement of the *dao*. (Cheng 2004: 169)

Now, if the reading of value in the *Laozi* I offered above, in terms of a one-all value monism, is on the right track, then Cheng's reading will have to be seen as only partially true. Cheng is right that the goodness of the Dao is not any mere good found in a known and named good stemming from a good/bad distinction, that the Dao itself, in relation to them, is not (merely) a named or known good. But it is also the case that it is the nonpresent Dao itself that generates all these value distinctions, all theses known names, values, present goods and bads and so on. The Dao ultimately *is* all these value distinctions. As we have already seen, chapter 2 continues, after telling us there is bad once good is known, by stating that 'presence (*you*) and nonpresence (*wu*) generate each other.' This means all good/bad distinctions are both distinct from and identical to the Good that produces and ultimately is them and which they too produce. The absolute, independent Good that is the Dao generates and returns to itself all good/bad distinctions and likewise all good/bad distinctions, all named and known values, generate the Dao's absolutely independent goodness. All relative, dependent goods and bads are the Dao's goodness. Each named and known good and bad is the Good that is the Dao. The Dao is all the ways it carves values into itself while severing nothing from itself. So, while the Dao's good, the Good, is not all the known goods and bads, by being both the perpetual post-carving disvalue and what precedes and forever remains distinct from all values, it is also that out of which and into which they are all generated and return. The Dao is thus ultimately the true value of all

known and named values and disvalues. The Dao is the one value that is all values, that all values are. Hence, one-all value monism might be the best way the read the *Laozi*'s latent axiology, an axiology based on an omnipresence rendered properly monistic.

One-all value monism might also help explain certain aspects of the sage's behavior in the *Laozi*. The Daoist sage tends to treat the good and the bad, or at least non-good, as being equally good, as being of equal value, as 'enjoying the same moral status.' For example, in chapter 27, we read about how sages have 'multiple clarity' or 'extended illumination,' a kind of moral knowledge or wisdom that does not result from the mere relative distinguishing between good and bad. Rather, this special moral wisdom results from how "sages are so constantly good, so good at rescuing people, so good at considering them good—finding not one to be worthless, abandoning none (Ziporyn 2023:32). Moeller speaks of how everything fits seamlessly into the sage, how "no people or goods remain outside him" (Moeller 2007: 66). Likewise, in chapter 49, the *Laozi* describes the sage as having no heart or intentions of his own, as always taking the people's heart or intentions as his own. The *Laozi* has the sage tell us why he does this: "I regard the good as good, but I also regard the not-good as good. For virtuosity is to be good at finding them all good" (Ziporyn 2023: 60). For the sage, who embodies and expresses the perspective of the Dao, all things, all people, good and bad, are good. Which good are they all? I would say the Dao's Good, the goodness that all values, goods and bads, are and with which he identifies, the good that he is and all things are. The goodness of the sage is the goodness of the Dao, and such goodness is the way and fact that all things are good. As we read in chapter 62 of the *Laozi*, "The Dao is the flow of the ten thousand things, the treasure of the good person, and that by which the person who is not good is protected" (Moeller 2007: 143). Similarly, in chapter 79, the *Laozi* says "The course of heaven has no favorites—it is constantly with good people," which on the face of it sounds incoherent, but makes perfect sense if we understand the course of heaven's impartiality being nothing but the good person's, the sage's, seeing all things, all goods and bads, as what they really are: the absolute and independent, the impartial, goodness of the Dao (Ziporyn 2023: 92). All values are the real value of the valueless value of the Dao, and that is what the sage is as well.

5 Moral Trivialism

After having the sage tell us, in chapter 49, that he finds the good and the not-good as equally good, the *Laozi* continues by reporting that, for the sage, "that which is true he holds to be true [and] that which is not true he also holds to be true. Thus he attains truth" (Moeller 2007: 117). What could this mean? How could the truth be the attainment of the true and not true being both true? Clearly, it is a contradiction for the true and not true to both be true. But, for the *Laozi*, it is a true contradiction, for it is how truth is attained. Truth is the attainment of the

true contradiction between true and not true. Now, a true contradiction is a dialetheia. Dialetheism is the attempt to offer a non-classical or paraconsistent logic that would allow from some local true contradictions to be attained, but not all. Dialetheism is thus the attempt to prevent the application of the principle of explosion (*ex contradictione quodlibet*), which says the attainment of one true contradiction entails the attainment of all true contradictions. This entails that every proposition, contradictory ones and the non-contradictory ones they are composed of, is true. The view which says that all propositions and all contradictions are true is trivialism (Priest 2006; Kabay 2010).[8] Dialetheism is the attempt to prevent trivialism. That the *Laozi* says many seemingly paradoxical and contradictory (or to use Ziporyn's term, 'ironic') things has long been noted. What has not been addressed directly is whether the *Laozi* treats its contradictions as true, and whether the *Laozi* in the end not only entertains dialetheism, but positively offers trivialism, a trivialist vision of truth and thus reality. If we do not get the sense that the *Laozi* is aiming to provide hints for a non-classical or paraconsistent logic that may prevent explosion into full trivialism, as perhaps one may find in certain forms of Madhyamaka Buddhism (Deguchi, Garfield, & Priest 2008), then I think we can hazard the claim that the *Laozi* can be read trivially, that is, it can be read as offering a version of trivialism, especially a moral trivialism.[9]

If one-all monism is the right reading the *Laozi*'s metaphysics, then we may already have established an indirect defense of trivialism. For trivialism to be true, reality must be trivial, which is to say all truthmakers must obtain. With respect to trivial reality, to say that one is all is clearly to utter a contradiction. To be one is usually not thought to mean that one is many, let alone that one is all. The reading on offer here has it that it is true that one is all and that each are that one, that one being is all beings and that each being is that one being. One being being all beings is thus a true contradiction. Each being being that one being is also a true contradiction. Indeed,

[8] Paul Kabay offers many very sophisticated arguments for trivialism in his work on the topic, but we do not have the space to rehearse them here. However, the best place to start with a defense of trivialism is to simply point out that its denial is impossible, for trivialism already asserts its own denial insofar as it holds that all assertions are true, including the assertion, 'trivialism is false' (Kabay 2010: 39-50).

[9] While Takahura Oda has claimed that the *Laozi* "embraces contradictions manifestly and…conceives them to be true resoundingly," he also asserts that nothing at all follows from the *Laozi*'s apparent trivialism. Instead of the application of the principle of explosion, the *Laozi*'s embracing of contradictions entails the application of a principle of non-explosion, of *ex contradictione nihil* instead of *ex contradictione quodlibet*. "This is because Daoist contradictions…remain to be true *per se* and thus invalidate those Western classical rules" (Oda 2024: 4). But I would claim the opposite: the *Laozi*'s trivialism certainly does entail that everything follows from it and thus that every proposition is true, thus providing validation and fulfilment of classic logic. Without the application of the principle of explosion, classical logic would have to be replaced by a non-classical or paraconsistent logic like dialetheism, but, as mentioned, there is no evidence that the *Laozi* entertains such a possibility. Graham Priest has argued otherwise by claiming that, while the *Laozi*'s Dao is a "contradictory object" insofar it is true that the Dao is both ineffable and effable, such a status as a contradictory object does not entail the *Laozi* explodes into trivialism (Priest 2021: 57). This is because, for Priest, through a paraconsistent logic like dialetheism, contradictories may indeed overlap, there providing some true contradictions such as the ones found in the *Laozi*, but such overlap is never complete and so never leads to full explosion. Again, I see no reason to think the Daoism of the *Laozi* does not bite the bullet and goes fully into trivialist territory, thus leaving classical logic as is.

these are true contradictions that apply to all beings and hence all judgements about them, not merely to a locally true contradiction, a dialetheia, but a full explosion of truth into trivialism, hence the attainment of truth through the holding of true and not true as true of each and every thing. If each one is the one that is all, then there is nothing that cannot be affirmed and confirmed of it. To be everything and nothing is to be unable to have anything false said of it. Or, putting the same point differently, everything false said of something that is everything and nothing is also true. All contradictions, all false judgments, all true judgments—they are all true. All truthmakers for all judgments obtain. Why? Because each truthmaker is all truthmakers.

Just as we saw with Ziporyn's notion of omnipresence entailing and ultimately becoming a monist view, a view of one-all monism, so must we view Ziporyn's ironic reading of the *Laozi* as ultimately entailing a global trivialism. Saying 'the Dao is non-Dao and the non-Dao is Dao' is not merely (or even really) to utter an ironic statement. It is to utter a contradiction, a contradiction taken as true, a true contradiction. Just as there is a point at which omnipresence becomes monism, so too is there a point at which irony becomes contradiction. Irony involves a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. It is a play on implied and literal meaning. But a contradiction involves two mutually exclusive statements being in direct opposition to each other. It would seem the statements 'the Dao is everything and nothing' and 'the Dao is non-Dao and non-Dao the Dao' would be much closer to the latter than the former. These are not mere pieces of irony. They are full-blown contradictions, contradictions the *Laozi* takes to be true. Based on this extended and amplified reading of Ziporyn's interpretation, we can say the *Laozi* offers both a one-all monism and global trivialism. These views mutually entail each other. Every judgment is true because every truthmaker exists as both what it is and what it is not, both one thing and all things. Each thing is the one thing that is all things because there is nothing false that could be said of it. Ironic omnipresence becomes trivialist monism.

If trivial moral truth follows as a local expression of trivial global truth—that is, if moral trivialism is a local expression of global trivialism—then what we have is a quite distinct and novel metaethical view. Moral trivialism is thus the metaethical we find in the *Laozi*. However, as a view, moral trivialism does not exist yet. With respect to moral epistemology, the contemporary taxonomy of metaethical views is incomplete. Robustly realist metaethical views like moral non-naturalism and moral naturalism are partial success theories, claiming that some moral judgments succeed at capturing the moral truth while others fail (Sayre-McCord 2015; Miller 2013). On the other hand, one robustly anti-realist view, moral error theory, is a complete failure view. It says that all moral judgments fail to capture moral truth because moral facts, as non-negotiable and categorically prescriptive reasons for action, are too weird to exist (Mackie 1977; Joyce 2001: Olson 2014). Other positions,

like certain noncognitivist views, which reject the psychological cognitivism and semantic factualism of the other realist and anti-realist options, technically do not regard moral judgments as in the business of being possibly true or false. Insofar as moral judgments are the expressions of mental states other than beliefs, and beliefs are the carriers of propositions, moral judgments could neither succeed nor fail at capturing moral truth (Ayer 1952; Miller 2013; van Roojen 2023). Likewise, moral discourse is technically not truth-apt insofar as it has a function other than the reporting of purported moral truths. So, thus far, we have three moral epistemological options with respect to whether moral judgments can be true: partial success and partial failure, complete failure, and neither success nor failure (complete or partial) (Campbell 2024). But what about complete success? What if every moral judgment succeeds at corresponding to the moral facts? Indeed, what if every moral, normative, and axiological judgement succeeded? What if all value judgments succeeded? What if all moral, normative, and axiological judgments were true? This would give us a moral, normative, and axiological trivialism. For the sake of ease, let's just describe this view as 'moral trivialism.'

Moral trivialism follows from one-all value monism. If every value is the one value that is all values, then there is no judgment concerning that value that could be false. Each value is itself and all the values it is not. Indeed, it is the one value that is all values and disvalues: the Good of the Dao. Good is good. Good is bad. Good is good and bad. Good is *the* Good. It is *the* Bad as well. It is the Good which is the Bad and vice versa. Each good, each bad, is the Good that is all goods and bads. Each bad, each good, is the Bad that is all bads and goods. No value judgment fails. Each value instantiates all values. Each thing instantiates all values, considering from the perspective of values, all things are values. Not only do values permeate all things, they ultimately are all things. Axiological omnipresence become one-all value monism. Thus all things are values. All things are all values. Value is both in and simply identical to all things. In metaethical terms, what we are describing is a robustly realist view that is both cognitivist and factualist like other realist views, but which denies a moral judgment could ever fail to succeed at corresponding to moral facts, that is, to values. This view would be the most robustly realist view conceivable. Moral reality—indeed, all reality—could never get realer than that. Why? Because every thing, as the Dao, is everything and nothing. Every value and disvalue is the Dao's ultimate value and disvalue. Each spoke is the hub that is the wheel which is the hub and every spoke. Each carving is the unhewn and all its carvings.

To conclude, let us consider what the motivations there could be for even considering views as apparently outrageous as one-all value monism and moral trivialism. For the early Daoists, as for most if not all ancient philosophers the world over, the goal was primarily therapeutic. In particular, the point in engaging in philosophical speculation was often the attainment of tranquility and even immortality. Could it be that moral

trivialism, along with trivialism in general, offers a way to attain some therapeutic upshot? Kabay concludes his defense of trivialism in just such a manner, discussing "trivialism and the good life" (Kabay 2010: 138). He argues that moral trivialism, believing that "every state of affairs obtains—good and bad," can lead to an experience of *ataraxia*, of freedom from trouble and anxiety (Kabay 2010: 138). Kabay has his trivialist offer the following wise advice, advice that sounds remarkably Daoist, especially Laozian:

> *Why be worried? Because of the misfortune that befalls you? You regret not having taken a different course of action? But necessarily all things obtain—including everything that is bad for you. There is nothing you could have done to prevent this. So why regret your past actions? Instead, be happy and relaxed. And besides, everything good obtains too—you have missed out on nothing. The conditions for a peaceful, tranquil, and meaningful life are here to enjoy. And there is nothing you need to do in order to ensure that this remains so. Stop your worry, and be happy—and do whatever pleases you.* (Kabay 2010: 138)

The *Laozi* appears to also advise us to avoid the usual emotional turmoil that attends most uses of morality. To Daoists, moralists like Confucians often betray their instability by their use of morality as a vehicle for discharging a variety of negative emotions: anxiety, fear, rage, impotence, and so on. Morality is pathological (Fraser forthcoming). The *Laozi* recommends, by contrast, to affirm all things as equally good and bad—to affirm each as what they are: the Good itself, the Bad itself—thus leaving one quiescent and at ease, affirmative and impassive. Moral trivialism is thus construable as a means for what could be described as salvation or liberation. Trivializing morality could be a way of perfecting morality and thus overcoming its pathological status. To remove from morality the usual sources of anxiety and anger that often leads to and follows from its use could be a way a Laozian metaethics contributes to the attainment of the good life, the life everyone and everything already enjoys.

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