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Title	Guo Xiang's value monism
Authors	Dockstader, Jason
Publication date	2026-04-02
Original Citation	Dockstader, J 2026, 'Guo Xiang's value monism', Philosophy East and West, vol. 76, no. 2, pp. 280-297. https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.2026.a987359
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	https://www.scopus.com/pages/publications/105038158562 - 10.1353/pew.2026.a987359
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Download date	2026-10-10 18:32:49
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/18916

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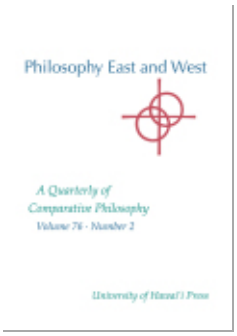
Guo Xiang's Value Monism

Jason Dockstader



Philosophy East and West, Volume 76, Number 2, April 2026, pp. 280-297 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.2026.a987359*

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GUO XIANG'S VALUE MONISM

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I. Value Monism

In his commentary upon the Daoist classic, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, the Wei-Jin era Neo-Daoist philosopher, Guo Xiang 郭象 (ca. 252–312 C.E.), says many very interesting things about values and reasons, about all things axiological and metanormative.[1] What Guo says is so interesting, in fact, that if one were to try to place his thoughts on these topics into contemporary value theory, one would not find a neat conceptual option or theoretical position into which he could easily fit. Guo seems to be offering something unique and novel, at least for us. Thus, the aim of this article is to discover and develop Guo's latent axiological views in terms of contemporary value theory so that we can both precisely identify his actual position and offer Anglophone thinkers a novel conceptual option to consider in key debates in value theory. Let us begin with one of those key debates.

There is a debate in contemporary value theory between value monists and value pluralists. The debate aims to determine the precise number of intrinsic values. An intrinsic value is a noninstrumental value. It is a value that is good in itself, good for its own sake, good as such, or good in its own right (Zimmerman and Bradley 2019). It is a value for which some other values are good insofar as they lead to or terminate in it. These other values would thus be instrumental or extrinsic values, even if there could be some noninstrumental extrinsic values, like, say, a family heirloom. Some candidates for an intrinsic value throughout the history of philosophy include pleasure, desire-satisfaction, life, virtue, friendship, beauty, health, utility, freedom, knowledge, and so on (Heathwood 2015; Zimmerman and Bradley 2019; Schroeder 2024). The debate between value monists and value pluralists consists in value monists asserting, and value pluralists denying, that one of these intrinsic values is *the* basic (Finnis 2021, p. 82; Riley 2000, p. 153), ultimate (Berlin 1969, p. 168; Crowder 1994, p. 293), or fundamental value (Kekes 1993, p. 189; Skorupski 1996, p. 101; Chang 2012, p. 12). The question is whether there is more than one value at the most basic, ultimate, or fundamental level. Value monists say there is only one, while value pluralists say there are many. Throughout the history of Western thought, value monism was the more common view, as it can be found in figures ranging from Plato and Aristotle to Kant and Hegel to Bentham and Mill. However, by the end of the twentieth century, in the Anglophone world, value pluralism

Philosophy East & West Volume 76, Number 2 April 2026 280–297
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was the more commonly held view, following the work of key figures like John Dewey, W. D. Ross, and Isaiah Berlin.

Value monists and value pluralists agree that there are a plurality of values. They both also agree that there is at least one intrinsic value. The nature of their disagreement consists mostly in whether there is more than one intrinsic value. Monists say no, pluralists say yes. It might be helpful to understand this debate more in terms of broader or more global metaphysical views. Monism and pluralism in the broader sense are concerned more with how many things exist in general. To be a monist is to attribute oneness. It is to say that one thing exists in some important sense. To be a pluralist is to attribute plurality, to say many things exist in some important sense. What determines a monism is how and with what it attributes oneness. In other words, a monism is disambiguated by what it targets and how it counts (Schaffer 2010). For example, existence monism is the view that only one concrete object exists: the whole universe, the "blobject," which may exhibit local or structural spatiotemporal variations in complexity but does not contain any proper parts (Horgan and Portč 2008). This means existence monism targets concrete objects and counts with tokens: only one concrete object exists. Existence pluralism would be the opposing view: many concrete objects exist. It too counts with tokens but says many concrete objects exist. This type of monism, called "priority monism," would say both one basic concrete object exists (the whole universe) and the many derivative things, the parts of the universe, exist as well. These parts exist by being asymmetrically and irreflexively dependent upon the whole universe, the one basic concrete entity. This means that priority monism is an existence pluralism. Unlike existence monism, it posits the actual existence of many things. However, the priority monist disagrees with the priority pluralist, that is, the global metaphysician who says that the many parts are more basic than, or metaphysically prior to, any whole into which they may compose.

To apply these distinctions between existence and priority monism and existence and priority pluralism to the debate between value monists and value pluralists, we can perhaps clarify this debate and identify which views are actually on the menu at the moment. It seems that both value monists and value pluralists target values and count with basic tokens. As mentioned, value monists and value pluralists agree that a plurality of values exist. As far as I know, no one has ever defended existence value monism, the view that only one value exists, that there exists only the Good or only the Bad. Also, value monists and value pluralists are not primarily debating with existence nihilism or existence value nihilism, the views that nothing exists or no values exist, respectively. Instead, value monists and value pluralists are debating the priority of one basic, intrinsic value or many basic, intrinsic values. Value monists, then, seem to be priority value monists, while value pluralists appear to be priority value pluralists. The debate is about how many basic values there are and which enjoys priority. The priority value monist says there exists only one basic or intrinsic value, and that all other values are thereby not intrinsic or basic insofar

as they are derivative of, or asymmetrically and irreflexively dependent upon, the one basic, intrinsic value. The priority value pluralist says by contrast that there is a plurality of basic or intrinsic (and nonbasic and extrinsic) values that metaphysically precede any whole into which they may compose. In fact, the priority value pluralist might like to say there need not even be a value whole into which all basic or intrinsic values compose. There could just be a plurality of intrinsic (and extrinsic) values, and that is the end of the story.

To take a step back, it does not seem that priority value monism and priority value pluralism are the only ways of answering the question of how many intrinsic values there are. For example, John Richardson has recently argued that implicit in Nietzsche's many axiological and metaethical comments is a kind of value monism that does not quite fit with either priority value monism or priority value pluralism (Richardson 2015, 2020). For Richardson (and most readers), Nietzsche appears to have held many contradictory views about values. Richardson claims that Nietzsche was a value monist, but a weird sort of one. Richardson analyzes Nietzsche's ultimate claims about values from the perspective of his absolute "Yes-saying (*Jasagen*)." This "Yes-saying" is usually described by Nietzsche in terms of other concepts like the eternal recurrence, universal affirmation, *amor fati*, and the Dionysian. For Richardson, what Nietzsche is getting at with these ideas is an axiological view that is a kind of inverse of priority value monism, that is, a kind of monism about value that says not that all intrinsic value lies in a single basic property like happiness, pleasure, virtue, or whatever, but that everything has the same value, that everything is good, even equally good, in some fundamental sense, perhaps in all senses (Richardson 2020, p. 358). Good is thus the only value, and all other values are ways that it is so. Richardson puts this in a couple of ways when he writes both that, for Nietzsche, "everything has this one value [good]—and the bad is just a way of being good" and "all of life is good, and the bad is only a form of the good" (Richardson 2020, pp. 355, 358).

However, Alex Silk appears to be onto something when he sees in Richardson a slight inconsistency in his discussion of Nietzsche's value monism (Silk 2021). It is not entirely clear that Richardson is right that Nietzsche is offering a kind of inverse priority value monism. In fact, in other passages Richardson reads Nietzsche as saying everything is good precisely because there is a single basic property all things share and to which they lead, which makes them good, and that is power. Everything is good because everything leads to the instantiation of power; indeed, because everything *is* in some sense a will to power, a will to power that is ultimately *the* will to power.[2] Nietzsche often speaks this way when describing life. He says life is will to power. He also says everything is alive. So, the simple inference would thus be that everything is the will to power. Being alive, being will to power, and being good: these three properties are the same, the same basic features of all things. This would mean that power is the one basic, intrinsic value upon which all other extrinsic, or instrumental, values would asymmetrically and irreflexively

depend as distinct parts of the whole of life, or the will to power, what ultimately exists for Nietzsche. This sounds like another priority value monism, inverted or not. And yet Richardson goes to great lengths to show that it is not merely that all other values are extrinsic to, or instrumental for, the realization of the basic, intrinsic value of power. In an absolutely key sense, all values already *are* the one intrinsic good of power. There is only one value, and all values are that value without somehow ceasing to be distinct values.

At this point, we might get the sense that what is needed in this debate is another option. If Nietzsche's understanding of values, according to Richardson, does not quite fit with either priority value monism or priority value pluralism, and Nietzsche remains an existence value pluralist, then what is likely needed is another conceptual option, another way of conceiving value monism. The gambit of this article is that we could look elsewhere for such a view. We could look to one of the only figures in the history of philosophy to have viewed values as somehow exhibiting both a fundamentally monistic and pluralistic nature, and this figure is Guo Xiang. I will thus discuss Guo's metaphysics and axiology in order to claim that there exists a third type of value monism, one that is likely what Richardson is reaching toward in his reading of Nietzsche. I will call this type of value monism, "one-all value monism." It will claim that each value is the one value that is all values. I will also offer one-all value monism as a possible solution to the puzzle as to the meaning of the Zhuangzian motif of "Walking Two Roads" (*liangxing* 兩行). To make sense of one-all monism, we need to start with Guo's metaphysical views about oneness more generally. Then we can apply his unique kind of global metaphysical monism to his understanding of values. Let's start with Guo's metaphysics.

II. One-All Monism

Guo is the author of the most important commentary on the Daoist classic, the *Zhuangzi*, a text he also compiled and edited down to its present, thirty-three-chapter form. He was a key member of an original philosophical movement that emerged following the fall of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.). This movement came to be referred to as "dark learning" (*xuanxue* 玄學), or Neo-Daoism (D'Ambrosio 2016; Chan 2019). Guo's commentary on the *Zhuangzi* is as much a philosophical achievement in its own right as the classic upon which it is the commentary. Guo developed many novel views on the nature of the Dao, nature, selfhood, action, transformation, and so on. His thought was also characterized by the chief issue of the Neo-Daoist movement, that of trying to reconcile *ziran* 自然 and *mingjiao* 名教, spontaneity and morality, Daoist self-so and the Confucian teaching of names. One could say he was trying to reconcile being and value. While there have been many excellent studies on the normative and moral implications of Guo's attempted synthesis of *ziran* and *mingjiao*, there have been no papers dedicated to explicitly determining the axiological consequences of Guo's thought, especially in relation to the debate

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between value monism and value pluralism (Coles 2019; Tan 2024; Chiu 2024; D'Ambrosio 2024; Bender 2024).

Perhaps the key idea to start with is *ziran*, spontaneity, or self-so. It is through his conception of *ziran* that we can see what kind of metaphysical monism Guo has to offer. Guo was a staunch denier of creation if by "creation" what is meant is any sort of external causal power serving as the source of the existence of anything whatsoever. To say the least, what this entailed was a complete rejection of the idea of some conscious or purposive creativity exhibited by some sort of person or agent, inside or outside of the world, operating on the basis of deliberation or design. Guo denied there was anything—any being or non-being, any existent or nonexistent entity, condition, or reality—distinguishable from the spontaneous self-causal existence of all beings. Guo used a number of terms to describe this global fact of the spontaneous existence of all things. One was "Dao" 道, the Way or Course of all things. Another was "heaven and earth," *tiandi* 天地, sometimes also translated simply as "nature." Guo writes,

> 'Heaven and earth' is just a blanket term used to indicate all beings. It is all individual beings that form the very substance of heaven and earth, and it is each being's self-so that aligns true to itself. 'Self-so' means what is so of itself, without being done by anyone or for any purpose. Thus, Peng's ability to fly high and the sparrow's ability to stay low, the great tree's ability to last long and the mushroom's ability to perish quickly, all these are done spontaneously, all are self-so; they are beyond the ability of anyone's particular activity. Because these are self-so capabilities not done by anyone or for any purpose, they are aligned true [to themselves]. (Ziporyn 2009, p. 132)[3]

For Guo, it is not only that things just happen. Things just *are* happening. We will see as well that this "just" means both "only" and "right" or "fit." It will be the source of value. These happenings, these spontaneous expressions of self-causal existence, are the very nature (*xing* 性) of each and every thing, and that is all there is to them (Perkins 2023). The self of self-so is not a self that does the so-ing. Rather, the self just is the so-ing, the so-ing of the self it is, the so-of-itself. As Guo writes, "doing cannot be done by someone 'doing' doing. Doing is spontaneously doing; it is self-so" (Ziporyn 2009, p. 188). Elsewhere, Guo tells us,

> So what is it that generates all becoming? All at once, each spontaneously self-generates. Self-generation does not mean being generated by me, the self. The self cannot generate things, and likewise things cannot generate the self. Thus, the self is 'so of itself.' What is so of itself is called what is so of Heaven. The Heaven-so is what is not deliberately created [by a self or by an other]. Hence, we use the word 'Heaven' to indicate that they are self-so, spontaneously so. It does not refer to the blue sky above! And yet, some think the piping of Heaven forces creatures to follow and obey it. But Heaven cannot even possess itself—how could it possess creatures? Heaven is just a collective name for all things. Since no one specific

> thing is Heaven, who could be the master to be served by creatures? Each thing self-generates, without recourse to anything that goes beyond itself. This is the Course of Heaven." (Ziporyn 2009, p. 139)

What I would like to emphasize is that, for Guo, while no one specific thing is Heaven—in the sense of no one specific thing being Heaven distinct from other things *not* being Heaven—it is also the case that, put positively, each specific thing *is* Heaven, that each thing *is* the spontaneity that *is* Heaven, the Course of Heaven. This means that each thing's being self-so is its being all things' self-so, the self-so that is Heaven or the Dao or the spontaneity of all things. What would need to be shown to assist this reading of Guo, then, is that he thinks each thing is every other thing, and thus each thing is the one thing that is all things, but in such a way that each thing's being all things in no way denies each thing's being different from all things, considering, as Ziporyn puts it, "difference itself is self-so as well" (Ziporyn 2003, p. 46). This would be an inclusive, and not an exclusive, notion of oneness, a oneness that is an allness. I think we can find evidence of these claims in Guo. If so, then we will be able to establish his view as offering a kind of metaphysical monism not presently available in Anglophone metaphysics. To find this claim in Guo, we can begin with how he describes the Dao's omnipresence:

> [T]he Course is everywhere. Hence, it is in the high place without being high, in the deep place without being deep, in the long enduring without being of long duration, in the old without being old. There is nothing it is not being, but it is not being whatever it is; it is everywhere present but only as an absence. For what reaches everywhere both high and low can be called neither lofty nor base. What is present both within and without cannot be named either inner or outer. What moves along together with every change cannot be called of long duration. What is constantly nonexistent from beginning to end cannot be said to be old." (Ziporyn 2009, p. 198)

On my reading, Guo appears to be implying here that omnipresence is also omni-identity. What distinguishes Guo's conception of omnipresence from the usual Western versions is that his Dao's being everywhere entails its also being everything. The Dao is everywhere, and by being everywhere, it is also everything. This has to be the correct reading of Guo if his total rejection of the reading of the Dao as non-being or a transcendental condition is going to be sustained. The Dao simply is each thing's self-so. The Dao is thus both high *and* deep, long *and* short, old *and* young, present *and* absent, nonexistent *and* existent without thereby being only or merely high *or* deep, long *or* short, and so on. Guo's Dao is not just these properties either, but it also *is* each thing that is high and deep, long and short, and so on. Guo's Dao is both everywhere and nowhere, both exists and does not exist, by both being all things and not being only any one of them in particular. The Dao is and is not everything in the sense that it is all things without thereby being any one of them in particular or exclusively or relatively or in opposition to any one or more than one of them. By being everywhere, it is nowhere in particular. By being everything, it is not

any one of them in particular. By being each thing, the Dao is not any one of them alone, merely relatively distinct from the rest. And by not being any one of them alone, it is all of them, that is, each one of them. Clearly, this can be stated in the inverse as well: if the Dao is each thing, then each thing is the Dao. What follows from this is that each thing is not only what it is, but also what it is not. Each thing is what it is, but also, insofar as it is Dao, it is not only what it is, but it is all that it is not, which is everything else, that is, everything. Each thing is all things. All things are the one thing that is all things: the Dao. Each thing, then, is the Dao, the one thing that is all things. Each thing is all that *is* because it is the Dao's not being only one thing but all things, thus rendering each thing all things.[4]

How does Guo further describe the Dao's oneness? He certainly does not describe it in terms of either existence or priority monism. It is not the case that only one thing exists. Many things exist. Indeed, all things exist. This is not only to say that all the things that exist, exist. It is also to say that literally everything exists, that everything that could exist does exist. Guo's existence pluralism thus entails a kind of actualism, the view that to be is to be actual. Mere possibilities would have to be self-so if they were to be at all, but if they are self-so, then they are actually self-so because to be self-so is to be actually self-so. But if they are actual, then they are not merely possible. Being actual, being self-so, is the only way to be, for Guo. Moreover, insofar as everything just is its spontaneous, self-causal power to exist, Guo also offers an implicit affirmation of the Eleatic Principle, or Alexander's Dictum: to be is to be a causal power. Combining existence pluralism with actualism and the Eleatic Principle means there is not much of a way to read Guo as an existence monist. A plurality of actual self-causal things exist. But Guo is also not much of a priority monist either. The Dao is not the metaphysically prior condition upon which all things are meant to asymmetrically and irreflexively depend. Rather, the Dao is symmetrically and reflexively identical to all the things it is not, that is, everything, everything it is *qua* their self-so, as we have just seen. Things neither depend upon nor are they the proper parts of the Dao. Things just are the Dao, each one of them. The Dao is the one thing that is all things, and each thing is that thing. Let us call this view, "one-all monism." I think we can read Guo as a one-all monist.[5]

Guo describes the Dao as "the true Primal Chaos, the jumble of oblique oneness" (Ziporyn 1993, p. 517). This "oblique oneness" is Ziporyn's translation of Guo's gloss on the Daoist concept of *xuantong* 玄同, which can also be translated as "dark identity," "mystical sameness," or "arcane unity" (He 2024; Lynn 2022). However put into English, the binary compound designates, for Guo, the idea that the Dao's chaotic oneness is its identity with both the entirety of all and the individuality of each of the plurality of things. But, we may wonder, what makes things different from each other if they are also all one, one with and as each other as the Dao? For Guo, it is their allotted nature (*xingfen* 性分), their principle or coherence (*li* 理), their self-fitness (*shi* 適), and their spontaneous self-determination that distinguishes them (Wong 2024).

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Each thing is spontaneously itself in its own way, not only obliquely one but also uniquely and unrepeatably one. Each has its own fit, its own fit not only with itself but also with its surroundings, with everything, everything that self-fits and fits in with all as well. Such fitness, though, entails the forgetting or ignoring of only relative differences, what Guo often refers to as "traces," *ji* 跡. Everything fits with everything else to the degree that one thing's being fit is all of them being fit. They all fit, so they are all fit. Each thing is its own Dao, the Dao that is all things by being none of any of the exclusively relatively distinct things it is, which are all *its* traces, the traces it leaves. It is important to emphasize that each thing's allotted nature, its principle, or its own way of being, is only momentary. The fitness of things is a self-so event as much as the things themselves. Each thing is, by its nature or principle, a spontaneous, instantaneous, self-identical, perfectly fit, and allotted determination distinct from all other things, including all other local spatiotemporal expressions of itself and all the other things that it is, namely, everything else.

Guo is thus also a kind of presentist, which makes sense considering presentism is regarded as the temporal analogue of actualism. Each thing exists only in the moment and only for a moment, only in a particular situation, but contained in that moment and situation is the entirety of what it is, what is, and what happens. This is true of each moment. There are only present moments, events, but they are each the Event that is all that happens. There are only present beings, but they are each the omnipresence of the Dao. There is only the unit, and so all units are different, but each unit is the unity, the dark, chaotic unity of the self-so Dao. Each thing is discernible yet identical. Such presentism does not entail that Guo denies the dependency or transformation of things upon or into each other. Rather, each thing is so dependent upon everything that it is not, it *is* the very independence of the entire web of dependency (Ziporyn 2009, p. 132). Each thing is so constantly transforming that it transforms away from and into what it is not by being the one sole or lone moment of transformation (*duhua* 獨化) that encompasses all transformations (Ziporyn 2003, p. 33; Lo 2020).[6] Every relative, local dependency is global independence. Every trace is self-so. Every relative, local transformation is the one, absolute lone-transformation, the self-causal, autogenerating self-so of the Dao. Everything both is and is not that upon which it depends and into and out of which it transforms, which is, namely, everything else.

Guo often speaks of oblique oneness in terms of that with and into which the Daoist sage merges and vanishes (*ming* 冥). Guo's sage simply becomes the "jumble of oblique oneness." He experiences self-realization or self-fulfillment (*zide* 自得) without in the process thereby losing his discreteness as an individual, *contra* Fraser's critique of Ziporyn's emphasis on *ming* as vanishing (Fraser 2020, p. 354). Of course, this self-fulfillment is only the sage becoming what he is, indeed, what all things are. Yet, he makes it explicit and in the process achieves a kind of naturalistic salvation and impersonal immortality. Guo thus offers further ways of highlighting the sage's merging with the independence of

the lone-transformation of all things, the self-so spontaneity of the Dao. Guo's sage achieves the purity of being completely unmixed by mixing with and simply becoming the impurity of all mixed beings:

> 'Pure' means unmixed. Taking part in the diversity of ten thousand harvests, present to all their changes—most people would call this being very mixed indeed. Hence, they slavishly labor their bodies and terrorize their minds, trying to get rid of one thing and going after some other thing. Only the great sage, because he is free of attachments, moves directly forward like an oblivious sprouting-forth, one with every transformation. One with every transformation, he roams always in the Singular. So although he may mix and participate in a hundred thousand different harvests, a thousand differences and ten thousand diversities, past and present form a single fully formed maturation, as a course is formed by walking it. *All things are a single rightness*, each is just 'so,' as things are made thus by calling them thus. Each thing is thus; each time is perfectly formed: this is what is here called purity." (Ziporyn 2009, p. 158)

While we will return to the axiological consequences of the single rightness of all things in the next section, we can again focus on how Guo's sage identifies with all things by "seeing the Singularity," by seeing all things as one, as himself, and thereby vanishing into them, becoming the one thing he and all things are (Ziporyn 2009, p. 198). Guo's sage is "the perfect Virtuoso who vanishingly unifies self and other, wanders far and unfettered" (Ziporyn 2009, p. 132). Everything that is and happens *is* the sage, and the sage is the Dao:

> Because he vanishes into each of them, there is no twoness between them [i.e., the energies of heaven and earth]. One who is always awake makes no resistance to wherever he may go, so when others cry, he cries too. This is precisely how each thing takes whatever suits it as 'this' and 'right.' I take each transformation, both life and death, as 'me.' Since all are me, how can I ever be lost? Since I've never been lost, what worries can I have? Because one makes no resistance, one cries when others cry. But because one has no worries, one cries without sorrow. There is nothing I fail to take as me, so inner and outer are invisibly unified, past and present strung together on one thread, constantly renewed along with all transformations—so how could anyone know where the 'me' is once and for all?" (Ziporyn 2009, p. 202)

Guo sage's is thus the explicit realization of his one-all monism. As Ziporyn puts it, "The oneness of the sages is the same oneness as the oneness of the Dao: a noneness, which is to say merely the spontaneity of all multiplicity coming to be itself and independently transforming" (Ziporyn 2003, p. 47). Ziporyn could have just as easily put this positively as, instead of a "noneness," an "allness," a oneness that is an allness. Guo's sage's "activity is heaven, his stillness earth, his motion the flow of water, his stopping the silence of the reservoir. But the silence of the reservoir and the flow of the water, the action of heaven and the stillness of earth, all are one in being self-so, free of deliberate activity" (Ziporyn 2009, p. 208). Each thing's spontaneity is its being the Dao, the spontaneity of all

things, and the Heavenly Impulse, and the sage is this. He becomes what he is, which is only what everything already is: the one thing that is all things. Ziporyn nicely summarizes Guo's one-all monism in this way:

> The True Jumble, the indiscernible Darkness, is the 'oblique oneness' (*xuantong*) of self and other; with respect to the other, this oneness is the other—that is, the other's own self-forgetting self-rightness, its spontaneous being what it is. With respect to the self, this oneness is the self—hence, again, the self's own self-rightness. This oneness is simply the self-so of each thing, its own self-forgetting fitness to itself. It is each entity being fit to its own determinacy, and hence forgetting itself in being whatever it is. This oneness is not some transcendental oneness embracing all things from above, but merely Guo's word for each thing's spontaneously becoming what it is. (Ziporyn 2003, p. 39)

III. One-All Value Monism

There is a clear normative and axiological dimension to Guo's one-all monism. Spontaneity is self-rightness. As Ziporyn puts it, "the term *ziran* is for Guo a kind of value term" (Ziporyn 1993, p. 516). Recall that we saw how things just are happening for Guo, doings without doers. This "just" means not only that things are only happening, but that things are right happenings, fit expressions of self-so. They are not only self-so, they are just so. Things are as they should be. This justness, rightness, and fitness of each thing is the source of Guo's discussion of values. Ziporyn, when discussing the *ran* in *ziran*, puts it this way:

> There are two senses of the Chinese character *ran* 然; like the English word 'so,' it can signify either that some thing is thus and so, or that some proposition is true or correct. Ran means both 'being as it is' and 'being right.' Guo's assertion that each thing is self-so plays on both of these meanings: each thing is considered both 'right to itself,' and 'autonomously and spontaneously the way it is, like this, so.' In this way, the term *ziran* for Guo designates both fact and value." (Ziporyn 2015, p. 402)

Guo's discussion of value can be found in his comments upon the *Zhuangzi*'s discussion of the centrality of the *shi/fei* 是非 distinction. Guo follows the *Zhuangzi* in seeing things as both projecting and simply being *shi/fei* distinctions. *Shi* can mean "this," "right," or "correct." A. C. Graham translated it as "that's it!" (Graham 2001, p. 52). As Ziporyn puts it, *shi* "implies both correctly identifying something as what someone intended to refer to and the affirmation of correctness" (Ziporyn 2009). In the *Zhuangzi*, *shi* is contrasted sometimes with *fei* and other times with *bi* 彼, which can mean "other" and "that." *Fei* can mean something closer to "wrong" both in an alethic and a moral sense as "false" or "untrue" and "bad" or "morally objectionable," respectively. This means that *shi* could be understood as "good." Graham translated *fei* as "that's not it!" (Graham 2001, p. 52). The *shi/fei* distinction can thus be understood in many ways: in basic indexical terms as "this/that,"

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in alethic terms as "true/false," in personal terms as "self/other," in normative terms as "right/wrong," and in axiological terms as "good/bad."

Guo follows the *Zhuangzi* in declaring that all beings equally assert their own rightness and goodness, their own *shi*, as *the* Way, necessarily thereby viewing all other beings in terms of wrongness and badness, in terms of *fei* or *bi*. Guo writes, "Every creature without exception considers itself right and the others wrong, praising itself and defaming others. It is in precisely this sense that, although each embraces a different definition of right and wrong, self and other are exactly equal" (Ziporyn 2009, p. 135). At first, this sounds like a mere relativistic point: "What I call 'this' and 'right,' the other sees as 'that' and 'wrong,' and vice versa" (Ziporyn 2009, p. 144). But Guo's comments on this phenomenon become increasingly paradoxical, to the degree that he affirms the truth of contradictory axiological judgments, offering not only a kind of axiological dialethism but also an axiological trivialism whereby every value judgment is true. Guo highlights the "unfixedness," "instability," and "endlessness" of value judgments, how "right and wrong endlessly replace each other, over and over again" (Ziporyn 2009, p. 146).

Values thus not only depend upon and transform into each other, becoming what they are not while remaining what they are, but they also entail and contain all that they distinguish from themselves. A single rightness or value is a self-so event of self-distinction whereby both the distinction itself and what is distinguished are contained within what makes the distinction. This is so to the degree that each right or value *is* all the values it is not, all that is distinguished from itself. Guo claims that "what each affirms as right is also not right, and what each considers wrong is also not wrong," that "the rights are not right and the wrongs are not wrong," to the point that he even concludes that "there is no right and no wrong" (Ziporyn 2009, p. 146). To put this more in value terms, Guo seems to be saying both that good and bad endure and undergo so much relative dependence and transformation that all values are also the disvalues from which they distinguish themselves, and vice versa; that good is bad and bad is good; that good is somehow both good and bad and neither good nor bad; and that bad is somehow too both bad and good and neither bad nor good. I think we can make sense of all this by keeping Guo's one-all monism in mind. If we do, we will discover his unique kind of value monism.

Each thing's spontaneity entails that it is right, that it deems itself as right and all others as wrong. We have seen that each thing just is the spontaneity that is Heaven or the Dao, the omnipresent self-causal self-so-ness of all things, the singular totality of each thing being the one thing that is all things. Now, if each thing is also the one right thing ("*all things are a single rightness*"), then each thing is the right thing that *is* all right and wrong things. But all other things are for themselves the one right thing as well, with all others being wrong. This must mean then that all things are both the one right thing that is all the wrong things *and* all the wrong things that are each the one right thing. The rightness of each thing is its being the wrongness of all other things, things which are also

the one right thing. In value terms, the spontaneity of things is the one value all values are, the one value of all values. This one value is *ziran*. Spontaneity is good, so good in fact that it is the good. But it is also bad because it is all other goods that are bad for all other goods, which are themselves also the one good thing. So, each value is the one value that is all values, but each value is both good and bad, the good that is all good and bad and the bad that is all bad of "not-this-good." This is what we get if we consistently apply Guo's one-all monism, which is based on his understanding of *ziran*, to his discussion of the *shi/fei* distinction. Guo seems to imply such a reading in a number of passages. It is not only a sort of normative or axiological relativism he offers, but a normative or axiological absolutism that sees each relative rightness, each value, as the one right thing, the one absolute value, that is all rights and wrongs, all values. Obviously, no normative or axiological view in the West, save possibly Nietzsche's, has ever offered a view so absolutist that it entails that each relative right and wrong, each good and bad, is the one absolute right or value that is all rights and values. But, as we will continue to see, this is because Guo's normative and axiological views are serving a primarily therapeutic end.

If all values are, for Guo, both relative and absolute, then we might be able to say something about whether they are extrinsic or intrinsic as well. Again, if we are being consistent, they will obviously be both. While the relative/absolute distinction does not perfectly match onto the extrinsic/intrinsic distinction in normal axiological discussion, if Guo sees each value as equally relative as absolute, then he will likely see each value as equally extrinsic as intrinsic. This will clearly have an effect on the present value-theoretic debate between value monism and pluralism. As we have seen with our present options of priority value monism and priority value pluralism, no matter how intrinsic—that is, no matter how basic, ultimate, and fundamental—a value is, it needs to not *be* other values in order to be itself. Guo partially agrees but then adds they must also be each other as well in order to capture the true spontaneous nature of values. He concludes there are no rights and no wrongs, no values, in *only* the relativistic or extrinsic sense if he is right that "all things are a single rightness," that all values are one value, and that each value is the one spontaneous, absolute, intrinsic value of the Dao. He affirms that all things being a single rightness or value means that each value is all values, and so he affirms all values as both relative and absolute, extrinsic and intrinsic. All values both lead to the fulfillment of the one intrinsic value, and thus are extrinsic, and are each one of them *the* one intrinsic value, and thus are intrinsic. This can be called "one-all value monism." It is likely the view Richardson was reaching toward in his discussion of value monism and eternal "Yes-saying" in Nietzsche. Richardson might have been trying to say all values, for Nietzsche, are each somehow both relative and extrinsic *and* fundamentally intrinsic and absolute, both a mere value among a plurality of others *and* the one value that is all values, which is the value of self-causal power, what Nietzsche describes as the will to power and Guo describes as *ziran*, self-so, self-causal spontaneity.

Nietzsche offered his eternal yes-saying, *amor fati*, affirmation of eternal recurrence, and so on as therapeutic and soteriological means for embracing his nascent one-all value monism. Guo, likewise, joins the *Zhuangzi* in offering the strategy of "Walking Two Roads" as the way for the Daoist sage to both grasp and live in accordance with one-all value monism. Guo writes,

> Each creature in the world affirms itself as 'this' and negates all the others as 'that.' Hence, each this/right and each that/wrong Walks Two Roads inexhaustibly. Only those who cross into the emptiness to find the center, holding nothing in their hearts but a vast openness, can wander along riding upon them all." (Ziporyn 2009, p. 146)

We are now in a position to solve the puzzle as to the meaning of "Walking Two Roads": to walk two roads is to affirm and thus become both the relativity and absoluteness of each value. By doing so, one frees oneself from attachment to any particular value so that one can become the oneness of each value being the value of all values. In other words, through the sage, each relative value is to become what it is: the absolute value that is the value of all values, *ziran*. Each *fei* becomes itself through the sage as both its own *shi* and the sage's *shi*, the one *shi* that is the Dao. This way, the sage is free of merely relative value and yet affirms and perfects its relativity by rendering it what it is, the absolute value of all values. This is what happens as the sage drifts into the emptiness of the center of every *shi*/*fei* distinction and opens his heart to the vast multiplicity of all values. He affirms and becomes all value by not taking any relative value as only relatively valuable, as only extrinsic and thus leading to something intrinsic, but rather as both relatively valuable *and* ultimately valuable, as both absolutely extrinsic and intrinsic. Thus, again, the sage realizes what all things, all values, already are: the one value that is all values.

So, we can see how Guo's one-all value monism, and perhaps Nietzsche's too, short-circuits the entire debate between priority value monism and priority value pluralism. The view affirms the ultimacy, basicness, or fundamentality of each value. This is, again, not an exclusive denial but rather an inclusive affirmative explosion of the plurality of values. There are many values. How many? All of them. But how many are intrinsic? Each value is intrinsic. But are there any extrinsic values? If so, how many? Yes, there are many extrinsic values. All values are extrinsic as well, for they all lead to and thus are the fulfillment of the one intrinsic value, the spontaneity of the Dao, the one intrinsic value all intrinsic and extrinsic values ultimately are. Each value is both extrinsic and intrinsic, for they all lead to the fulfillment of the basic, ultimate, and fundamental value, *and* simply are the one basic, ultimate, and fundamental value: the Dao, *ziran*. Guo thus pushes priority value pluralism to a final or perfected expression by pushing priority value monism to a final or perfected, an absolutized, expression: the absolute infinity of values is both all the extrinsic values that lead to the one intrinsic value *and* the one intrinsic value that is all values. Each value is both as well.

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In this way, Guo completes his goal of reconciling *ziran* with *mingjiao*, spontaneity with morality, Daoist self-so, and the Confucian teaching of names. Each name is rendered perfectly spontaneous. Morality is naturalized. All ises are oughts and all oughts are. All values obtain. Value becomes what is, being itself. Value is the omnipresent actual self-causal power that is what *is*. Guo sees things and values *as* what they are, as each other, and thereby forgets any merely only local or relative view of or attachment to them. This is also again how Guo's sage obtains a weird sort of impersonal immortality. By walking two roads, the sage lives every life and dies every death without ever having merely lived or died. This is what seeing values as what they are can do. Indeed, it is the view we should all likely take because it is the Good. Luckily, it is also the view we all, all things, already take. All things thus are already good, already the Good. Everything is already perfect and thus perfected, which is what they must become. That is what the sage does. He makes things become what they are. He makes value explicit, which is not to moralize but to just say yes to everything, to say the Yes everything already says to itself, thereby becoming all yeses and noes. To take *this* view is to vanish into, to become, the one that is all, the Dao:

> Forgetting what year it is, life and death are mysteriously unified. Forgetting what should or should not be, right and wrong are threaded onto a single string. The shaking loose of right and wrong, life and death, to form a oneness is the utmost guideline. The utmost guideline pervades unobstructedly without end, and thus one who entrusts herself to it is never able to be brought to a halt. (Ziporyn 2009, p. 161)

Notes

1 – For this article, I will not be concerned with what specifically distinguishes values from reasons, what may make one metaphysically prior to the other, or whether one could or must be reduced to the other. Agnosticism on these issues can be retained throughout without a deleterious effect on the argument. Besides, as one would expect, there was no hard and fast distinction between the right and the good in classical and early Medieval Chinese thought. We will see that Guo's conception of *ziran*, self-so, applies to both actions and states of being. Also, I will treat "value theory" and "axiology" as roughly synonymous in this article, even if we could view the latter as a species of the former (Schroeder 2024).

2 – In Nietzsche, there is a slight difference between power and the will to power in the sense that power is more the general ability or capacity to influence or overcome any resistance exhibited by any drive, force, or "quantum," while the will to power is the fundamental, objective, underlying drive that expresses itself through all these instances of power. The will to power is the basic metaphysical fact of all manifestations of power, of each will to power. Instances of power are thus perspectival

ramifications of the will to power. However, on my reading and following Richardson, the emphasis is placed on the fact that each instance of power, each will to power or "power-will," *is* the will to power, the one will that modifies itself through and as all wills (Nietzsche 1998, p. 52).

3 – Since I will develop certain aspects of Brook Ziporyn's reading of Guo Xiang in this article, I will use his translation of Guo's commentary on the *Zhuangzi*, though I have consulted Richard John Lynn's recent excellent translation of both the *Zhuangzi* and Guo's commentary (Lynn 2022). One might wonder if Ziporyn is editorializing in his translation, as it appears to contain additional phrases that are not explicitly in the text. However, this is because Ziporyn employs the method of "double translation," the technique in which a translator offers simultaneously multiple translations of a passage in order to account for the nuances and ambiguity of the original. Classical Chinese is often noted for its ambiguity. Ziporyn's strategy for dealing with it is to occasionally offer double translations of key passages. While some translators use brackets or notes to disambiguate the original, Ziporyn uses an extra phrase or a repetition of a key line, often in continuation of his already proffered interpretation of the text, to disambiguate it. Ziporyn occasionally has his English text contain several phrases to render a single one in Chinese, thereby conveying the plurality of alternate meanings at once (Ziporyn 2020, p. xxxiv).

4 – Chris Fraser has claimed that, with respect to Guo's Dao, "we should not refer to *dao* in the singular or as a totality at all, but to the extent it makes sense to do so, *dao* is wholly immanent in things" (Fraser 2020, p. 346). I would reply that Guo's Dao being wholly immanent in things *is* its being singular and thus the totality of all things, as long as it is understood that such singularity and totality do not designate an exclusive oneness but an inclusive oneness, a oneness that is an allness. The Dao's immanence is its inherence to all things, yes, but it is also its being inclusive of all things to the degree that each thing is the Dao's being the singular thing that is the totality of things. The totality of things is the singularity of each thing being the totality of things. The singularity of things is their each being the totality of singular things. That is what the immanence of Dao seems to entail if we are to consistently emphasize spontaneity and sustain Guo's denial of non-being.

5 – In contemporary metaphysical terms, one-all monism would be the combination of metaphysical monism with Megan Wallace's and, at times, Donald Baxter's strong view of many-one, or composition as, identity (Wallace 2011; Baxter 1988). This view says the parts of a whole are, taken together, identical to the whole they compose. With Guo, however,

what we have is something closer to perhaps the 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. Hence, "one-all monism": the whole universe is one thing that is reflexively and symmetrically identical to each of its parts. Each part of the universe, whatever it may be, *is* the whole universe, and vice versa.

6 – Fraser has taken issue with the reading of *duhua* as "lone-transformation" because "the connotation of 'lone' may be misleading, since *duhua* often involves interaction with other things" (Fraser 2020, p. 346). Of course, Fraser's "independent transformation" works as well, but as long as by "lone" one does not mean exclusive but rather inclusive (inclusive of all interaction), oneness, then "lone-transformation" can still be regarded as an acceptable translation.

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