

Form as Substance in the Zhuangzi (莊子)

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Abstract: The Zhuangzi (莊子) is a famously difficult text to interpret. The style is chaotic and parodical. The short stories and rambling prose are often preoccupied with the issue of divergent perspectives, not only between people but also between species. The author expresses a hostile attitude toward claims to knowledge. For these reasons, it has been common to interpret the Zhuangzi as a skeptical and relativistic text. I argue that there is a much more interesting interpretation available. On my interpretation, the central message of the Zhuangzi is that discursive inquiry rests on a mistaken presupposition that there is a sensible concept of 'objective truth'. This interpretation has the virtue that it explains not only the content of the text, but also its form.

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