

THE ILLUSION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING: ZHUANGZI, WITTGENSTEIN, AND THE GROUNDLESSNESS OF LANGUAGE*

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Abstract

Beginning with an anecdote from the Zhuangzi about a wheelwright who is unable to pass on his knack for wheel-making to his son, this article goes on to argue that the process of teaching and learning in this context should not be understood as one of transmitting knowledge but instead as one of cultivating habits. According to Zhuangzi, learning does not mean attaining truths given to one by another, but means familiarizing oneself with concepts by applying them in different situations. To clarify these arguments, I compare Zhuangzi’s position to that of Wittgenstein, who I attempt to show has similar views on teaching and learning. Most significantly, I argue that both Zhuangzi and Wittgenstein see language as logically and phenomenally groundless, and that this view influences their endorsement of exemplification and practice over explanation and definition with regard to meaning and understanding. Given their perspectives on language and practice, any pedagogical process developed from the philosophies of these two thinkers would not be concerned with imparting knowledge or principles but with cultivating skills through emulation and habituation. Consequentially, before teachers can actually teach efficiently, they must themselves possess habits appropriate to what they are teaching.

Keywords: Zhuangzi; Wittgenstein; pedagogy; language; groundlessness

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In the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, there is a short anecdote depicting an encounter between Duke Huan and Wheelwright Pian, which begins when the wheelwright openly criticizes the duke for reading the words of ancient sages. The duke, appalled by this act of defiance, proclaims that the wheelwright shall be put to death unless he explains himself at once. In response to this threat, the wheelwright relates this criticism to his own trade:

When carving a wheel, if I am too relaxed, it will be loose and will not fasten; if I am too hasty, it will be stressed and will not attach. If I am not too relaxed and not too hasty, I will take it in my hand and respond with my heart and mind. My mouth cannot put this into words; there is a knack in it. I cannot teach this to my son and my son cannot receive this from me. This is why I have aged seventy years and grown old carving wheels. The people of antiquity and what they could not transmit are both dead and gone. This being so, what you, my lord, are reading is nothing but the dregs of ancient people.¹

The anecdote ends here, so Duke Huan is not given an opportunity to react, but if one had to guess at his reaction, one might argue that he would have been shocked by this response.

Though Wheelwright Pian specifically made this statement in order to criticize the value of the words of ancient sages, it also questions the process of teaching and learning in general. According to the wheelwright, proper understanding cannot be taught or learned but requires an ineffable knack (*shu* 數). This is why he has remained a wheelwright throughout his long years, since he was unable [1208] to pass on this knack to his son. And this is why he considers ancient texts to be particularly valueless. Without the proper knack for sagacity, one could not even begin to follow the teachings of living sages, so what could one possibly gain from them now that they are dead? Initially, this may seem to imply that teaching is a fruitless task and that nothing can be learned in any significant sense. This is certainly a disheartening claim, especially with regard to

¹ 斲輪，徐則甘而不固，疾則苦而不入。不徐不疾，得之於手而應於心，口不能言，有數存焉於其間。臣不能以喻臣之子，臣之子亦不能受之於臣，是以行年七十而老斲輪。古之人與其不可傳也死矣，然則君之所讀者，古人之糟魄已夫。 *Zhuangzi* 13/37/15–13/37/18. All numbers refer to *A Concordance to the Zhuangzi* (D.C. Lau, Ho, and Chen, 2000). All translations from Chinese are entirely my own, unless otherwise noted.

philosophies of education. What point is there to pedagogical practices if nothing can be taught or learned?

Though the implications of this passage from the *Zhuangzi* are considerable, I do not believe they in any way imply that pedagogy is pointless. Instead, as I shall argue in this article, this and other such passages in the *Zhuangzi* do not seek to completely discount the value of teaching or learning but to criticize one interpretation of what it means to teach and learn, namely that which takes this process as one of transmitting or imparting knowledge. After discounting this view, I further argue that pedagogy for Zhuangzi should instead be understood as a process of emulation and habituation. Learning for Zhuangzi does not mean accessing universal truths that are granted to one by another, but instead means familiarizing oneself with concepts by enacting or making use of them in different contexts. In making these claims, I shall appeal to Wittgenstein as a means of structuring my arguments, because his philosophical position can be likened to Zhuangzi's in many respects, which I hope to show as this article progresses.

I spend the first section of this article showing why the transmission model of teaching and learning does not work for Zhuangzi or Wittgenstein. In this section, I appeal to Wittgenstein's discussions on ostensive definition and rule-following, and to his claims about sudden understanding, in order to clarify the problems Zhuangzi has with teaching and learning, respectively. Once these problems have been introduced, I attempt to get to the heart of them by examining both Zhuangzi's and Wittgenstein's attitudes toward language, focusing on the fact that, for both of these thinkers, language is fundamentally groundless. After this, I spend the last section describing what teaching and learning would actually entail for these two philosophers. The pedagogical process for them would not be concerned with the transmission of universally correct knowledge but instead with the cultivation of contextually appropriate habits.

The Problems with Transmission

Throughout the *Zhuangzi*, there are numerous passages depicting the inability to teach something to those who do not already have a knack for it. Many of these passages are presented as dialogs between disciples and masters, with the former seeking to be taught what is often translated as “the Way” (*dao* 道) by the latter. In one such passage, Zikui from Nanbo asks a woman named Yu whether or not he can learn the Way, and she replies that he is not the kind of person who can learn such a thing.² However, she later states that it is easy to articulate the way of the sages to one who has the stuff of a sage.³ Though teaching is possible here, only those who have the right “stuff” (*cai* 才) can actually be taught. But what this means exactly is unclear, especially given the fact that this text and the arguments it presents are generally parabolic rather than logical, which may make them seem mystical to those unfamiliar with this form of philosophizing. So, to clarify what these passages entail in the *Zhuangzi*, I shall frame them in terms of Wittgenstein’s thought.

As for teaching, one can begin to understand its meaning for Zhuangzi by examining Wittgenstein’s thoughts on ostensive definition and rule-following. For Wittgenstein, we cannot actually teach someone what words mean through ostensive definition, at least not in the way we may believe ourselves able to. One might presume that by pointing to something and saying its name, one is able to share their knowledge of that thing with another. In the words of David Stern (2004), one may presuppose that people possess “the peculiar, quasi-magical ability to disambiguate” ostensive definitions and discover the truths that they point toward (p. 97). However, when one actually points at something and states what it is, one cannot know whether the person they are teaching really understands what they want them to. If a teacher points to an object and

² 南伯子葵曰：「道可得學邪？」曰：「惡！惡可！子非其人也。」 *Zhuangzi* 6/17/10.

³ 以聖人之道告聖人之才，亦易矣。 *Zhuangzi* 6/17/12.

says, “This is blue,” a young child might assume “blue” refers to the object itself rather than the color, or to its size, shape, or texture. As Wittgenstein (1997) states, [1209] “an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in *every* case” (p. 14^e, PI §28). This does not mean ostensive definition is pointless, but that it only becomes valuable “when the overall role of the word in language is clear” (Wittgenstein, 1997, p. 14^e, PI §30). If someone does not yet grasp the grammatical role of a word, ostensive definition will only leave them guessing.

The fact that ostensive definition for Wittgenstein only works if one already grasps the grammatical structure of a particular language resembles the fact that only those with the sagely stuff can be taught the sagely way for Zhuangzi. The basic idea is that the sort of teaching that attempts to point someone toward understanding is only possible if one is already well acquainted with the conceptual framework that structures what they are being taught. That I can point to a strange looking object and sensibly tell someone, “This is a lamp,” is because this person is not only familiar with the concept of “lamp” but also with the idea that pointing and saying a word is indicative of a definition. This criticism of ostensive definition resonates well with Zhuangzi because he, in the words of A.C. Graham (1989), holds that “names have only a conventional relation to objects” (p. 10). Thus, one cannot teach anyone anything by means of pointing until they have become familiar with the conventions of language that constitute their learning environments.

However, this discussion of ostensive definition only gets to the surface of Zhuangzi’s criticisms of teaching. In order to develop his remarks further, one can also compare them with Wittgenstein’s examination of rule-following. As with ostensive definition, teachers might believe that they can teach students how to solve equations by getting them to understand particular rules in the same way they understand them. However, Wittgenstein (1997) argues that this is a mistaken

assumption because “every action according to [a] rule is an interpretation” (p. 81^e, PI §201). If a student forms an interpretation of a rule that is different from their teacher’s and seems unable to apply the rule as the teacher would like them to, then their “capacity to learn may come to an end” (Wittgenstein, 1997, 57^e, PI §143). And even if the student does seem to apply this rule correctly, the teacher can never know for certain if the student actually understands this rule as they do. The only way they could even get close to knowing this is by having the student apply the rule in an infinite number of cases, which is impossible.

Wittgenstein also finds similar issues with regard to sudden understanding. When learning a rule, one might feel as if they suddenly understand what is expected of them, as if the whole rule has instantaneously formed in their mind. However, this feeling is misleading. According to Wittgenstein (1997), a flash of insight captures an entire thought no more than a few notes scribbled on a piece of paper do (p. 105^e, PI §319). Such a flash of insight is nothing more than an inkling of a thought that has yet to be fully formulated. As Marie McGinn (2013) states, sudden understanding “acts as a prompt to thoughts which [we] develop in speaking” (p. 220). The feeling of certainty the student has that they could now apply the rule in any number of cases is thus unfounded, at least until they actually start applying the rule correctly in different cases. Prior to this, however, one’s feeling of certainty is nothing but an unjustified and unjustifiable *feeling*.

These issues regarding teaching and learning are rooted in our belief that “understanding itself is a state which is the *source* of the correct use” of words or rules and that correct understanding is something that can be imparted or transmitted from a teacher to a student (Wittgenstein, 1997, p. 58^e, PI §146). For Wittgenstein, however, there is no such source for our pointing or rule-following, at least not one that plays any role in these activities. Similar claims are spread throughout the *Zhuangzi*. At one point, Zhuangzi claims that “using the unlevelled to

level will leave our leveling unlevelled and using the unverified to verify will leave our verifying unverified”.⁴ As Graham (1989) states, “in looking for reasons one is caught in an infinite regress, testing by tests which in the end are themselves untested” (p. 11). This statement resembles Wittgenstein’s claim that rules cannot be explained by means of further rules, since all rules are open to interpretation. Though we may feel as if there must be some ground for our rule-following, we are never actually able to verify this.

There are many figures throughout the *Zhuangzi* who possess analogous feelings, believing that there must be some reasonable explanation for people’s actions. For example, when the Marquis of Lu went to visit Engraver Qing, he asked the engraver to tell him the secret (*shu* 術) behind his creations, but the engraver claimed he had no secret.⁵ Likewise, after witnessing a man effortlessly swimming [1210] in a whirlpool, Confucius asked this man if he had some way (*dao* 道) of keeping himself afloat, but this man said he had no way.⁶ Furthermore, when Yan Hui saw a ferryman masterfully maneuvering a boat through the water, he asked the ferryman if this skill was something that could be learned. The ferryman responded by stating that good swimmers have a knack for it, but when Yan Hui inquired further he had nothing more to say.⁷

As was mentioned previously, these passages may seem mystical, but I would argue that they suggest something more like Wittgenstein’s famous claim that nothing is hidden. As Wittgenstein (1997) states, “since everything lies open to view there is nothing to explain” (p. 50^e, PI §126). This is why teaching and learning as a process of transmission falls short for both of these thinkers. Since there is nothing of any substance below the surface to be transmitted, trying

⁴ 以不平平，其平也不平；以不徵徵，其徵也不徵。 *Zhuangzi* 32/97/8.

⁵ 曰：「子何術以為焉？」對曰：「臣工人，何術之有！」 *Zhuangzi* 19/52/4–5.

⁶ 曰：「吾以子為鬼，察子則人也。請問蹈水有道乎？」曰：「亡，吾無道。」 *Zhuangzi* 19/51/29–19/51/30.

⁷ 吾問焉，曰：「操舟可學邪？」曰：「可。善游者數能。若乃夫沒人，則未嘗見舟而便操之也。」吾問焉而不吾告。 *Zhuangzi* 19/50/18–20.

to teach or learn as if there were can only lead to misunderstanding. For Zhuangzi, before one can begin to learn properly, one must first abandon the idea that there is some secret method behind people's actions. Said differently, before one can properly tread the Way, one must discard the idea that "the Way" has some fixed reference. This accords with the opening lines of the *Daodejing* 道德經: "The Way that is put into words is not really the Way, and naming that assigns fixed reference is not really naming".⁸ The term translated here as "really" (*heng* 恆) can also be translated as "ordinary" or even "habitual," which suggests that the ordinary is what is most real. This is interesting with regard to Wittgenstein's thought. For Wittgenstein, the meaning of words is not established by appealing to any underlying reality but is a matter of convention, determined in everyday activity. In his own words, "it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language-game" (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 28^e, OC §204). For both of these thinkers, meaning is not grounded in some ultimate reality but is continuously developed and transformed through our interactions in the contexts wherein we speak and act.

The Groundlessness of Language

Before I describe what teaching and learning might actually look like for Zhuangzi and Wittgenstein, I want to discuss their attitudes toward language, which provide the framework for their perspectives on meaning and understanding. Specifically, I wish to continue the discussion on the groundlessness of words that was introduced in the last section, describing what this implies in more detail. Despite coming from traditions with drastically different linguistic frameworks, both Zhuangzi and Wittgenstein reject the value of formal logic and criticize those who attempt to structure language logically. While Zhuangzi directs these criticisms toward his opponents, such

⁸ 道，可道也，非恆道也。名，可名也，非恆名也。 *Daodejing* 1; Compare my translation with that in Ames and Hall, 2003.

as the Mohists and Logicians, Wittgenstein aims them at analytic philosophies of language, which include his earlier claims in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, where he stated that there is in fact an underlying symbolic language that “is not dependent on any convention, but [...] corresponds to a logical form” (Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 17, TLP 3.315). Rather than taking this logical approach, Zhuangzi and Later Wittgenstein claim that language is devoid of such logical foundations.

In opposition to his claims in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein (1997) states in the *Philosophical Investigations* that “*essence* is expressed by grammar” and that “grammar tells what kind of object anything is” (p. 116^e, PI §§371, 373). There are numerous significant consequences that follow from this shift away from logic toward grammar. The first has to do with logic itself and its role in language and philosophy. For Wittgenstein, the problem with philosophy is that it is infatuated with universal logical form, which philosophers presuppose grants us access to logically determined truths underlying our propositions. However, according to Wittgenstein, no such truths are ever appealed to in our ordinary use of language. In everyday life, words take on a complex variety of meanings in different contexts and possess a subtlety of meaning that cannot be captured by any limited set of logical principles. This does not imply that logic is completely worthless for Wittgenstein, but that its influence on language is nowhere near as strong as logicians believe it to be. Logic does not serve as the underlying metaphysical structure of language but is a tool we use in the various language-games we play.

Zhuangzi makes similar claims against the value of logical debate. Specifically, he criticizes the notion that anything can be affirmed (*shi* 是) or denied (*fei* 非) universally. In doing this, he draws a distinction between what may be called inflexible, non-contextual affirmation (*weishi* 為是) and flexible, [1211] contextual affirmation (*yinshi* 因是), where the former assumes

knowledge is unconditional and the latter assumes it is provisional (Peterman, 2008). In making this distinction, Zhuangzi is *not* adopting the philosophical skeptic's position that we must doubt everything we do because we cannot have certain knowledge. Instead, he makes this claim that affirmation depends on circumstance in order to put an end to the constant quarreling that occurs between those who believe their views to be universal. He thus criticizes the Confucians and Mohists for arguing against one another, since they are really just talking past each other. In Wittgensteinian terms, they are playing entirely different language-games. To address this issue, Zhuangzi somewhat sarcastically proposes the use of "lodging words" (*yuyan* 寓言) as a means of settling such philosophical debates. Zhuangzi's basic argument is that anyone who affirms or denies anything absolutely will only respond positively to claims that they already agree with, so the only way to settle an argument with such a person is to "lodge" oneself into their perspective by adopting the expressions they use.⁹

Beyond logic itself, the shift toward grammar as the foundation of things also empties language in general of any phenomenal grounds. Wittgenstein makes this clear by drawing a distinction between *concepts* and *phenomena*. For Wittgenstein (1997), whenever we analyze something, like our thinking, for instance, "we are not analyzing a phenomenon (e.g. thought) but a concept (e.g. that of thinking), and therefore the use of a word" (p. 118^e, PI §383). Thus, when we speak we only ever speak about concepts. Since language is not determined by underlying forms but by how words are used, we can never speak about any phenomenal processes lying behind our concepts. Even if such phenomena do exist, our expressions can never refer to them. Wittgenstein (1997) describes this approach when he states that "[the phenomenon of pain] is not a *something*, but not a *nothing* either! The conclusion [is] only that a nothing would serve just as

⁹ 與己同則應，不與己同則反，同於己為是之，異於己為非之。Zhuangzi 27/79/19–27/79/20.

well as a something about which nothing could be said” (p. 102^e, PI §304). In other words, it does not matter if such phenomena exist, since language can never approach them.

This argument may sound strange and idiosyncratic, but Zhuangzi makes remarkably similar claims during his discussion of “spillover-goblet words” (*zhiyan* 卮言). This group of words—which actually consists of all words—is “named after a kind of vessel which tips over when it is filled to the brim and then rights itself,” and represents “the ordinary language in which meanings fluctuate but right themselves in the spontaneous flow of discourse” (Graham, 1989, p. 26). Like Wittgenstein, Zhuangzi does not believe that language grants us access to logical or phenomenal truths, but that words are empty of essences and are continuously filled with new meanings in new contexts. This is why Zhuangzi cryptically states that “we speak our entire lives without ever once saying anything, and say nothing our entire lives without ever once failing to speak”.¹⁰ The distinction being drawn here is one between two significantly different approaches to language, one that grounds it in fundamental truths and another that sees it as an organic process that has no ultimate ground, but instead grows and develops as it is applied.

All of this may seem to suggest that Zhuangzi and Wittgenstein are relativists, since language for them is fundamentally groundless. However, I would argue that this is not the case, for their conceptions of language are not wholly undetermined and meaning is not something that is completely open-ended. According to Wittgenstein (1997), while “it is what human beings *say* that is true and false [...] they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life” (p. 88^e, PI §241). Meaning here is not determined by some ultimate reality underlying our words, but it is not entirely without determination either. Instead, it is determined by *language itself* as the framework structuring our experiences. How things mean for

¹⁰ 終身言，未嘗言；終身不言，未嘗不言。Zhuangzi 27/79/24.

us depends on the complexity and subtlety of the language-games we play in different contexts. And even though these language-games are constituted by our speaking, the warp and weft of language limits what we are able to say in any given situation. One could argue that reality does not ground language but language grounds reality, at least as it is experienced conceptually.

For Zhuangzi, this conceptual and contextual approach to language can be extended to all of our endeavors, because all activities resemble language in their groundlessness. This connection can be seen in the Chinese character *dao* 道, which is commonly translated as “the Way” but can also be translated as “speech” and “method.” For Zhuangzi, just as speech is groundless, methodology is never based on anything either. There is no secret *modus operandi* underlying what we say and do. There is no logical [1212] form behind our words that can be imparted to students of some particular language and there are no hidden methods behind our actions that can be transmitted to students of some particular practice. How we speak and act is just determined by how we are brought up to speak and act, by the particular systems of language and practice wherein we actually begin speaking and acting. Beyond these systems and the particular vocal or bodily expressions that follow from them, there is only uncertainty.

Learning as Habituation

In the previous section, I tried to show that the transmission approach to pedagogy does not work for either Zhuangzi or Wittgenstein, since both of these thinkers hold that there are no grounds for our words and actions. If we take this to be the case, then how might we understand teaching and learning with respect to such groundlessness? We can begin formulating an answer to this question by examining some of the remarks that these two thinkers make about teaching and learning directly. According to Wittgenstein, if the student has yet to grasp some particular set of concepts, the teacher should cultivate their ability to *use* these concepts. As he states, “if a person has not

yet got the *concepts*, I shall teach him to use the words by means of *examples* and by *practice*” (Wittgenstein, 1997, p. 83^e, PI §208). Under this paradigm of teaching, “all that happens is that the pupil is told, or shown, what to do in a few instances, with some surrounding talk about why that thing is the thing to do,” then they practice doing it (McDowell, 1979, p. 341). There is never any appeal to underlying truths behind our actions or foundational principles that reveal the universally correct ways of doing things. Instead, teachers merely provide students with examples and allow these students to work through them.

Similar sentiments concerning teaching are expressed through an anecdote in the *Zhuangzi* concerning the crippled sage Wang Tai, about whom a disciple of Confucius states the following:

When he stands he does not instruct and when he sits he does not discuss, yet his disciples are empty when they go to him and full when they return home. Is there in fact a speechless teaching? Are his heart and mind consummate even though he is deformed? What sort of person is this?¹¹

In drawing a distinction between acts of speech (i.e. instruction or discussion) and acts of movement (i.e. standing or sitting), this statement expresses the idea that the crippled sage does not actively teach anything to his disciples but acts as an example they can follow. His teaching is speechless because he does not say anything, but lets his actions speak for themselves. For Zhuangzi, this figure is sagely because he is empty of universal truths and does not seek out students in order to teach them such truths. Instead, he has dissolved the boundaries between himself and the world, becoming one with the myriad things (*wanwu* 萬物), and the potency (*de* 德) of his actions inevitably draws students to him.

¹¹ 立不教，坐不議，虛而往，實而歸。固有不言之教，無形而心成者邪？是何人也？*Zhuangzi* 5/13/7–5/13/8.

From the student's perspective, exemplification and practice are significant because they are what lead to the development of the ability to actually do something. As Wittgenstein (1997) states, when we learn to do something, our "'learning it' will mean: being able to do it" (p. 118^e, PI §385). Learning as such is not concerned with the eventual accumulation of abstract principles but with the development of practical skills and habits. As we learn new concepts by observing how they are used in context and applying them to situations in our own lives, we eventually become so familiar with them that we forget we ever learned them. At least this is the case under ordinary circumstances. Philosophers often attempt to analyze these concepts in and of themselves, and in doing so mistakenly reify as absolute truths or hidden phenomena what are in fact only consequences of habit. One may *feel* as if there is something underneath the surface, but such feelings are groundless and may now be said to be a product of the conceptual frameworks we have developed through habituation.

While hints of the significance of habit formation can be found in Wittgenstein's work, Zhuangzi goes into much more detail on this topic, for it is a vital aspect of learning and acting in the Daoist tradition. One of the most significant passages on this topic revolves around Cook Ding, who describes his experience of learning how to carve oxen as follows:

When I first began carving oxen, I saw nothing but oxen. After three years, I never saw a complete ox. Now I approach this in a spirit-like way and do not look with my eyes. Sensory knowing has come to a halt and my spirit acts as it desires.¹² **[1213]**

This process of learning how to carve oxen provides an excellent example of learning as developing habits through continuous practice. At first, Cook Ding was overwhelmed by the ox's body as a whole, not knowing where or what to carve. But as he practiced, he learned how to

¹² 始臣之解牛之時，所見无非牛者。三年之後，未嘗見全牛也。方今之時，臣以神遇，而不以目視，官知止而神欲行。 *Zhuangzi* 3/8/4–3/8/5.

ignore the parts that were irrelevant to his trade. Eventually, he was able to embody his practice so well that he no longer saw anything as he worked. This could be taken as a principal characteristic of an exemplary student for Zhuangzi: just as ideal teachers do not *talk about* anything underlying what they teach but only provide examples, great students do not *look for* anything underlying what they learn but only practice.

Given these perspectives on teaching and learning, how might one understand the role of teachers and students in the pedagogical process? Though teachers cannot impart knowledge to their students, they *can* provide them with conceptual tools to help them develop appropriate habits. This is why Wittgenstein promotes practice and exemplification over explanation and definition. When teaching someone how to do a particular task, Wittgenstein (1997) states, “I do it, he does it after me; and I influence him by expressions of agreement, rejection, expectation, [and] encouragement. I let him go his own way, or hold him back; and so on” (p. 83^e, PI §208). Gilbert Ryle (2009) makes a similar claim about developing knowledge-how, stating that “appropriate exercises (corrected by criticisms and inspired by examples and precepts) can inculcate second natures” (p. 233). According to this model, teachers do not explain what they are doing, since there is nothing to explain, but merely guide the actions of their students. One might consider Wittgenstein a behaviorist for emphasizing action over phenomena and one would not be too far off, since all phenomenal experiences are for him rooted in the behavioral habits that form our conceptual frameworks. However, Wittgenstein does not go so far as to claim that there are *no* phenomenal processes underlying our words and actions, but only that we cannot say anything about them.

Zhuangzi also describes how this process of habituation influences the student. Returning to an anecdote mentioned previously, when Confucius asked the man swimming in a whirlpool how he could do this, the man responded as follows:

I begin with what precedes me, grow with my propensities and come to completion through fate. I enter when the water flows inward and emerge when it flows outward. I follow the water's way and do not impose myself upon it. This is how I tread within it.¹³

The most significant aspect of this statement is the limitation it places on learning. According to Zhuangzi, how and what we can learn depends in large part on forces beyond our control, including our biological, environmental, and social conditions. However, since there are no universally correct ways of doing things, these conditions do not restrict our ability to learn but instead provide the basis for our being able to learn in the first place.

There are multiple consequences that follow from all the interpretations of pedagogy given above. For one, being unable to transmit knowledge does not make teaching useless. While a teacher cannot make a student understand something in the same way they understand it, they can place the student in an appropriate setting where they can begin cultivating habits associated with what it is they are trying to learn. Teaching students how to use mathematical language by giving them examples provides them with an environment wherein they may become competent in the application of mathematical formulas. Teachers can also guide their students by actively refusing to give clear explanations or even by providing cryptic responses, which is often what happens in the seemingly mystical passages of the *Zhuangzi*. As Nicholas Burbules (2008) states, “refusing to explain [...] throws the burden of thought back onto the learner in order that they will have to guess or figure out what is meant” (p. 671) Another consequence is that teachers must be

¹³ 吾始乎故，長乎性，成乎命。與齊俱入，與汨偕出，從水之道而不為私焉。此吾所以蹈之也。
Zhuangzi 19/51/30–19/52/1.

habituated themselves if they are going to help students develop their own habits. This is because teachers are most importantly models that their students can emulate. This is embodied rather well in an anecdote about a young girl accidentally breaking a cup while washing dishes with her mother (Burbules and Smeyers, 2008). In response to this, her mother immediately breaks another cup to *show* her daughter that a broken dish or two is nothing to fret over. That a mother could respond like this so spontaneously is something that requires much effort and practice to achieve. [1214]

Conclusion

Regarding a case where a teacher attempts to instruct a student by means of ostensive definition, Wittgenstein (1997) states the following:

It seems to us as though in this case the instructor *imparted* the meaning to the pupil—without telling him it directly; but in the end the pupil is brought to the point of giving himself the correct ostensive definition. And this is where our illusion is. (p. 114^e, PI §362)

The illusion here is that after observing a student properly enacting what they have been taught, the teacher then assumes that they somehow transmitted this knowledge to the student by some unobservable means. Throughout this article, I have attempted to show how both Zhuangzi and Wittgenstein seek to dispel this illusion. Specifically, I have appealed to their discussions on the groundlessness of language and their convictions that everything is open to view. For these thinkers, there are no secret processes or hidden methods grounding what we say and do. Instead, we merely develop habits by saying and doing things, and it is philosophers who then mistake these habits for innate, preexisting truths.

Though these thinkers do not develop explicit philosophies of education, I believe there is much they can contribute to our conceptualization of the pedagogical process. By claiming that everything of value is on the surface, expressed immediately in what we say and do, these thinkers provide a means of tackling serious issues in the field of education—especially regarding the

education of young children, who have not yet been conditioned by cultural norms—such as the predominance of standardized testing or the prevalence of theory-based learning over experiential learning. While there have been movements emphasizing practice over theory, theoretical language still prevails for the most part. Figures like Zhuangzi and Wittgenstein, however, offer us a means of developing a pedagogical language that does not take concepts as abstract and unaffected by circumstance, but as concrete and continuously transforming from one context to another. If we were to adopt such a language with regard to teaching and learning, grounding knowledge in what we actually say and do, we may be able to alter our assumptions regarding what it means to be knowledgeable.

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