

14. 秋水

《莊子・秋水》

秋水時至，百川灌河，涇流之大，兩涘渚崖之間，不辨牛馬。於是焉河伯欣然自喜，以天下之美為盡在己。順流而東行，至於北海，東面而視，不見水端，於是焉河伯始旋其面目，望洋向若而嘆曰：「野語有之曰：「聞道百以為莫己若者」，我之謂也。且夫我嘗聞少仲尼之聞而輕伯夷之義者，始吾弗信；今我睹子之難窮也，吾非至於子之門，則殆矣，吾長見笑於大方之家。」北海若曰：「井鼃不可以語於海者，拘於虛也；夏蟲不可以語於冰者，篤於時也；曲士不可以語於道者，束於教也。今爾出於崖涘，觀於大海，乃知爾醜，爾將可與語大理矣。」

Autumn Rivers

< The Zhuangzi >

In autumn, when all the streams and rivers rose to their seasonal high peak, they all rushed water into the River. The River, to accommodate an enormous volume of water flowing into it, had to widen its course to such an extent that a person viewing from an islet in the River would not be able to distinguish between a cow and a horse on the bank. The god of the River, buoyant and content with what he had in his possession, seemed to think he owned all the beautiful things of the world.

He then took a ride down the River to the east till he came to the North Sea. Looking up to the east, much to his amazement, he found the sea was so vast that it had no bounds. He turned to Ruo, the god of the North Sea, and said with dismay, “A common saying goes, ‘When one learns to know a little truth, he tends to think he knows all the truth and no one is his equal.’ This is, perhaps, said of me. Previously, I heard there were those who ridiculed Confucius for his knowing so little, and those who belittled Bo Yi for his superficial understanding of justice. Earlier I did not share these views. Now I do after I realised the immense vastness of your territory. If I had not come across you and come to your domain, I would still be so miserably ignorant and self-complacent, and enlightened people would still laugh at me for my inability to know.”

The god of North Sea said, “People do not talk about the sea to a frog who lives all his life in a well because of the limited experience it has; nor, for the same reason, do they talk about ice to an insect who has its life span only in the summer. Similarly, one does not address a nonintellectual person about philosophies of life because of his inability to understand.

“Now, moving out of the shadow of your old abode in the river, you, for the first time, become aware of your inferiority and powerlessness in front of the vast sea. Your humble attitude, however, shows that you are someone I can talk to about the great truth.”