SAGESQUOTE

Zhuangzi

莊子

45 QUOTES

Zhuangzi (莊子)

The comic genius of Chinese philosophy: parables, dreams and freedom from being useful.

DAOISM

莊

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Every entry below gives four things: the saying in English, the original Chinese as it stands in the text, the book or chapter it comes from, and who translated that line. Nothing here is copied from a modern edition.

- **45** sayings from Zhuangzi (莊子).
- Each line is labelled with its translator — either a named public-domain source or SagesQuote's own rendering from the Chinese.
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Zhuangzi (莊子). Zhuang Zhou wrote philosophy as fiction — giant fish, talking skulls, cook carving an ox, a man unsure whether he is a man who dreamt a butterfly. Under the jokes sits a serious claim: the world does not exist for your use, and freedom begins when you stop needing it to.

01 In the northern ocean there is a fish, called the Leviathan, many thousand li in size. This leviathan changes into a bird, called the Rukh, whose back is many thousand li in breadth.

北冥有魚，其名為鯤。鯤之大，不知其幾千里也。化而為鳥，其名為鵬。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 1 — "Free and Easy Wandering" 逍遙遊
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

02 With a mighty effort it rises, and its wings obscure the sky like clouds.

鵬之背，不知其幾千里也；怒而飛，其翼若垂天之雲。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 1 — "Free and Easy Wandering" 逍遙遊
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

03 If there is not sufficient depth, water will not float large ships.

水之積也不厚，則其負大舟也無力。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 1 — "Free and Easy Wandering" 逍遙遊
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

04 Small knowledge has not the compass of great knowledge any more than a short year has the length of a long year.

小知不及大知，小年不及大年。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 1 — "Free and Easy Wandering" 逍遙遊
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

05 The mushroom of a morning knows not the alternation of day and night. The chrysalis knows not the alternation of spring and autumn.

朝菌不知晦朔，蟪蛄不知春秋。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 1 — "Free and Easy Wandering" 逍遙遊
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

06 The perfect man ignores self; the divine man ignores action; the true Sage ignores reputation.

至人無己，神人無功，聖人無名。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 1 — "Free and Easy Wandering" 逍遙遊
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

07 Great knowledge embraces the whole: small knowledge, a part only. Great speech is universal: small speech is particular.

大知閑閑，小知間間；大言炎炎，小言詹詹。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 2 — "On the Equality of Things" 齊物論
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

08 And inasmuch as the subjective is also objective, and the objective also subjective, and as the contraries under each are indistinguishably blended, does it not become impossible for us to say whether subjective and objective really exist at all?

彼亦一是非，此亦一是非。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 2 — "On the Equality of Things" 齊物論
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

09 The universe and I came into being together; and I, and everything therein, are ONE.

天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 2 — "On the Equality of Things" 齊物論
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

10 A keeper of monkeys said with regard to their rations of chestnuts that each monkey was to have three in the morning and four at night. But at this the monkeys were very angry, so the keeper said they might have four in the morning and three at night, with which arrangement they were all well pleased.

狙公賦芧，曰：朝三而暮四。眾狙皆怒。曰：然則朝四而暮三。眾狙皆悅。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 2 — "On the Equality of Things" 齊物論
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

11 Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tz■, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of following my fancies as a butterfly, and was unconscious of my individuality as a man. Suddenly, I awaked, and there I lay, myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming I am a man.

昔者莊周夢為胡蝶，栩栩然胡蝶也。自喻適志與！不知周也。俄然覺，則蘧蘧然周也。不知周之夢為胡蝶與，胡蝶之夢為周與?

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 2 — "On the Equality of Things" 齊物論
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

12 My life has a limit, but my knowledge is without limit. To drive the limited in search of the limitless, is fatal; and the knowledge of those who do this is fatally lost.

吾生也有涯，而知也無涯。以有涯隨無涯，殆已！

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 3 — "The Secret of Caring for Life" 養生主
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

13 Pursue a middle course. Thus you will keep a sound body, and a sound mind, fulfil your duties, and work out your allotted span.

緣督以為經，可以保身，可以全生，可以養親，可以盡年。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 3 — "The Secret of Caring for Life" 養生主
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

14 I fall back upon eternal principles. I follow such openings or cavities as there may be, according to the natural constitution of the animal.

依乎天理，批大郤，導大窾，因其固然。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 3 — "The Secret of Caring for Life" 養生主
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

15 A good cook changes his chopper once a year,--because he cuts. An ordinary cook, once a month,--because he hacks. But I have had this chopper nineteen years, and although I have cut up many thousand bullocks, its edge is as if fresh from the whetstone.

良庖歲更刀，割也；族庖月更刀，折也。今臣之刀十九年矣，所解數千牛矣，而刀刃若新發於硎。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 3 — "The Secret of Caring for Life" 養生主
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

16 For at the joints there are always interstices, and the edge of a chopper being without thickness, it remains only to insert that which is without thickness into such an interstice. By these means the interstice will be enlarged, and the blade will find plenty of room.

以無厚入有間，恢恢乎其於遊刃必有餘地矣。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 3 — "The Secret of Caring for Life" 養生主
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

17 Now, wild fowl get a peck once in ten steps, a drink once in a hundred. Yet they do not want to be fed in a cage.

澤雉十步一啄，百步一飲，不蘄畜乎樊中。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 3 — "The Secret of Caring for Life" 養生主
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

18 The fuel is consumed, but the fire may be transmitted, and we know not that it comes to an end.

指窮於為薪，火傳也，不知其盡也。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 3 — "The Secret of Caring for Life" 養生主
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

19 Hills suffer from the trees they produce. Fat burns by its own combustibility. Cinnamon trees furnish food: therefore they are cut down. The lacquer tree is felled for use. All men know the use of useful things; but they do not know the use of useless things.

山木自寇也，膏火自煎也。桂可食，故伐之；漆可用，故割之。人皆知有用之用，而莫知無用之用也。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 4 — "The Human World" 人間世
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

20 To serve one's own heart so as to permit neither joy nor sorrow within, but to cultivate resignation to the inevitable,--this is the climax of Virtue.

知其不可奈何而安之若命，德之至也。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 4 — "The Human World" 人間世
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

21 A man does not seek to see himself in running water, but in still water. For only what is itself still can instil stillness into others.

人莫鑑於流水而鑑於止水，唯止能止眾止。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 5 — "The Sign of Virtue Complete" 德充符
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

22 Thus it is that virtue should prevail and outward form be forgotten.

德有所長而形有所忘。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 5 — "The Sign of Virtue Complete" 德充符
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

23 When the pond dries up, and the fishes are left upon dry ground, to moisten them with the breath or to damp them with spittle is not to be compared with leaving them in the first instance in their native rivers and lakes.

泉涸，魚相與處於陸，相呴以濕，相濡以沫，不如相忘於江湖。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 6 — "The Great and Venerable Teacher" 大宗師
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

24 TAO gives me this form, this toil in manhood, this repose in old age, this rest in death.

夫大塊載我以形，勞我以生，佚我以老，息我以死。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 6 — "The Great and Venerable Teacher" 大宗師
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

25 "I have freed myself from my body," answered Yen Hui. "I have discarded my reasoning powers. And by thus getting rid of body and mind, I have become ONE with the Infinite. This is what I mean by getting rid of everything."

墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通，此謂坐忘。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 6 — "The Great and Venerable Teacher" 大宗師
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

26 TAO has its laws, and its evidences. It is devoid both of action and of form. It may be transmitted, but cannot be received. It may be obtained, but cannot be seen.

夫道，有情有信，無為無形；可傳而不可受，可得而不可見。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 6 — "The Great and Venerable Teacher" 大宗師
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

27 For just as a duck's legs, though short, cannot be lengthened without pain to the duck, and a crane's legs, though long, cannot be shortened without misery to the crane, so that which is long in man's moral nature cannot be cut off, nor that which is short be lengthened.

鳧脛雖短，續之則憂；鶴脛雖長，斷之則悲。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 8 — "Webbed Toes" 駢拇
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

28 One man steals a purse, and is punished. Another steals a State, and becomes a Prince. But charity and duty to one's neighbour are integral parts of princedom.

彼竊鉤者誅，竊國者為諸侯，諸侯之門而仁義存焉。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 10 — "Rifling Trunks" 胠篋
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

29 On the other hand, unless Sages disappear, neither will great robbers disappear; nor if you double the number of Sages wherewithal to govern the empire will you do more than double the profits of Robber Chê.

聖人不死，大盜不止。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 10 — "Rifling Trunks" 胠篋
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

30 By inaction, he administers the empire, and has energy to spare; but by action he finds his energy inadequate to the administration of the empire.

無為也，則用天下而有餘；有為也，則為天下用而不足。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 13 — "The Way of Heaven" 天道
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

31 "You not being a fish yourself," said Hui Tz■, "how can you possibly know in what consists the pleasure of fishes?" "And you not being I," retorted Chuang Tz■, "how can you know that I do not know?"

子非魚，安知魚之樂？……子非我，安知我不知魚之樂？

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 17 — "Autumn Floods" 秋水
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

32 You cannot speak of ocean to a well-frog,--the creature of a narrower sphere. You cannot speak of ice to a summer insect,--the creature of a season. You cannot speak of TAO to a pedagogue: his scope is too restricted.

井蛙不可以語於海者，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。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 17 — "Autumn Floods" 秋水
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

33 In the universe I am but as a small stone or a small tree on a vast mountain.

吾在天地之間，猶小石小木之在大山也。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 17 — "Autumn Floods" 秋水
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

34 From the point of view of TAO, there are no such extremes of value or worthlessness. Men individually value themselves and hold others cheap.

以道觀之，物無貴賤；以物觀之，自貴而相賤。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 17 — "Autumn Floods" 秋水
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

35 Small bags won't hold big things; short ropes won't reach down deep wells.

褚小者不可以懷大，綆短者不可以汲深。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 18 — "Perfect Enjoyment" 至樂
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

36 A man who plays for counters will play well. If he stakes his girdle, he will be nervous; if yellow gold, he will lose his wits. His skill is the same in each case, but he is distracted by the value of his stake. And every one who attaches importance to the external, becomes internally without resource.

以瓦注者巧，以鉤注者憚，以黃金注者殙。其巧一也，而有所矜，則重外也。凡外重者內拙。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 19 — "Mastering Life" 達生
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

37 To be unconscious of one's feet implies that the shoes are easy. To be unconscious of a waist implies that the girdle is easy.

忘足，履之適也；忘要，帶之適也。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 19 — "Mastering Life" 達生
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

38 The friendship of the superior man is negative like water. The friendship of the mean man is full-flavoured like wine. That of the superior man passes from the negative to the affectionate. That of the mean man passes from the full-flavoured to nothing.

君子之交淡若水，小人之交甘若醴。君子淡以親，小人甘以絕。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 20 — "The Mountain Tree" 山木
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

39 And so it is that in trouble and calamity mere money questions are neglected, while we ever cling nearer to that which is from God.

以利合者，迫窮禍患害相棄也；以天屬者，迫窮禍患害相收也。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 20 — "The Mountain Tree" 山木
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

40 Straight trees are the first felled. Sweet wells are soonest exhausted.

直木先伐，甘井先竭。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 20 — "The Mountain Tree" 山木
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

41 Man passes through this sublunary life as a white horse passes a crack. Here one moment, gone the next.

人生天地之間，若白駒之過隙，忽然而已。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 22 — "Knowledge Rambling in the North" 知北遊
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

42 The universe is very beautiful, yet it says nothing. The four seasons abide by a fixed law, yet they are not heard. All creation is based upon absolute principles, yet nothing speaks.

天地有大美而不言，四時有明法而不議，萬物有成理而不說。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 22 — "Knowledge Rambling in the North" 知北遊
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

43 The raison d'être of a fish-trap is the fish. When the fish is caught, the trap may be ignored. The raison d'être of a rabbit-snare is the rabbit. When the rabbit is caught the snare may be ignored. The raison d'être of language is an idea to be expressed. When the idea is expressed, the language may be ignored.

荃者所以在魚，得魚而忘荃；蹄者所以在兔，得兔而忘蹄；言者所以在意，得意而忘言。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 26 — "External Things" 外物
Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

44 I take heaven and earth as my coffin, the sun and moon as my twin jade discs, the stars as my pearls, and the ten thousand things as my grave offerings.

吾以天地為棺槨，以日月為連璧，星辰為珠璣，萬物為齎送。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 32 — "Lie Yukou" 列禦寇
Translated for SagesQuote

45 Alone, he comes and goes with the spirit of heaven and earth, yet he does not look down on the ten thousand things.

獨與天地精神往來，而不敖倪於萬物。

Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 33 — "The World" 天下
Translated for SagesQuote

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ONE TO KEEP

My life has a limit, but my knowledge is without limit. To drive the limited in search of the limitless, is fatal; and the knowledge of those who do this is fatally lost.

吾生也有涯，而知也無涯。以有涯隨無涯，殆已！

— Zhuangzi (莊子), Chapter 3 — "The Secret of Caring for Life" 養生主

Trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889

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