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7.3 Self-defeating theories

Zhuangzi formulates Hui Shi's **monist conclusion** in one of the most beautiful passages in the chapter.

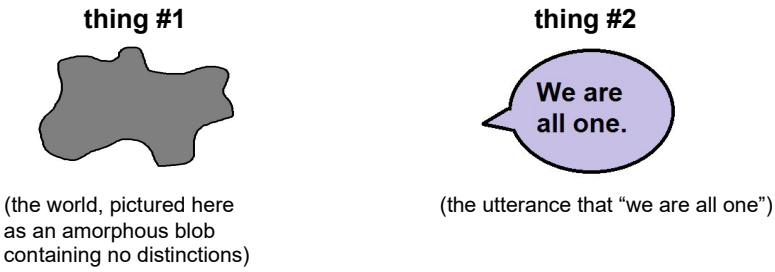
天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一。
Heaven, Earth, and I were born together; the ten thousand things and I are one.
(Zhuangzi: Chapter 2: 9)

And because it sounds so beautiful, people often think that that's Zhuangzi's own view. But in fact, as soon as Zhuangzi formulates the view, he begins to reflect on it critically. As he analyses it, he finds a contradiction. The judgment that everything is one entails many. Zhuangzi puts it this way,

既已為一矣，且得有言乎？既已謂之一矣，且得無言乎？一與言為二，二與一為三。自此以往，巧歷不能得，而況其凡乎！
Since we have already deemed it one, can we now put it in language? Given we have already said it is one, can we fail to have put it in language? The one and saying "one" **of** it make two; two and one make three. And from this it proceed and the tools of calculating cannot keep up with it, much less we ordinary beings!
(Zhuangzi: Chapter 2: 9)

Hidden behind the obscurity of the passage, Zhuangzi point is his acceptance of the *aboutness* of language.

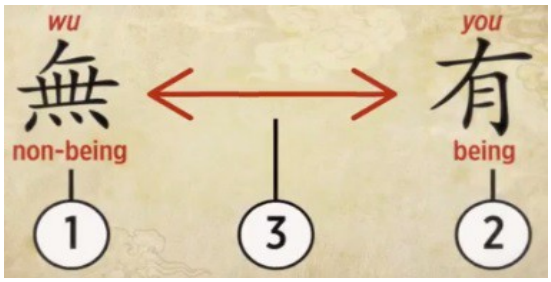
- "Okay let's say that **we are all one**. But if we ***say*** that, then there are now **two things**, aren't there?"



- "And if there are now **two** things, then if we ***say*** there are two things, then there will be **three** things."

"And we can keep going on like this to infinity", says Zhuangzi. So it seems that Hui Shi is caught in a paradox when he **says** "**everything is one**."

Zhuangzi on being and non-being in Laozi



Zhuangzi makes a similar point in the context of *being* and *non-being* in the Laozi. Zhuangzi says: "If we start from 無 **wú** (non-being) and move to 有 **yǒu** (being), then we already have **three** things: 1. non-being, 2. being, and 3. the movement from one to the other."

Zhuangzi's conclusion is: *better not to start!* **Don't look for an absolute basis of everything.**