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道德經 Tao Teh Ching / Lao Tzu 老子

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Abstract

There are many philosophies that profess a particular lifestyle, but most are very difficult to adhere to in today's western society. While the ideals, and in some cases, most of the lifestyle practices can be observed, there is always frustration when the necessities of modern life interfere and compromises need to be made. Taoism seems to escape nearly all conflicts with other lifestyles. As the main components of Taoism seem to be a major part of most eastern philosophies and many western philosophies there is an easy fit with most lifestyles. The lack of specifics and the use of paradox to illustrate ideas allows one to apply Lao Tzu's wisdom to one's own particular circumstances. Ultimately, I believe it is the idea of reverting to the natural way rather than opposing it that allows the Tao Teh Ching to be a useful tool in today's life.

道德經 Tao Teh Ching / Lao Tzu 老子

According to tradition, Lao Tzu was an archivist of the imperial court of Chao in the sixth century B.C., and was consulted there by Confucius himself. The legend goes that one day Lao Tzu decided to leave the imperial court, and riding on a water buffalo made for the city gates. At the gate, the gatekeeper, afraid to lose such wisdom, asked Lao Tzu to write down his thoughts before he left. Lao Tzu, supposedly, did write down about 5,250 words that are the Tao Teh Ching, after which he did leave and was never seen or heard from again. The name Tao Teh Ching means “Classic of the Way and its Virtue”. Lao Tzu’s 5,250 words are set into eighty-one chapters divided into two parts. The first part, chapters one through thirty-seven, is known as the Tao Ching or Classic of the Way. The second part, chapters thirty-eight through eighty-one, is known as the Teh Ching or Classic of Virtue. In fact, both Tao and virtue are discussed in both parts, but the Tao Ching refers to the metaphysical aspects of the Way and Virtue while the Teh Ching refers more to social virtues. The main theme is to let nature be, to interfere as little as possible, but it is not about pacifist, inaction. Rather it is how to achieve ends subtly and to recognize enough. The Tao Teh Ching calls for a return to and the fulfillment of ones true nature; in this, its wisdom is timeless and very relevant today.



1

TAO can be talked about, but not the Eternal Tao.
Names can be named, but not the Eternal Name.

As the origin of heaven-and-earth, it is nameless:
As "the Mother" of all things, it is nameable.

So, as ever hidden, we should look at its inner essence:
As always manifest, we should look at its outer aspects.

These two flow from the same source, though differently
named;
And both are called mysteries.

The Mystery of mysteries is the Door of all essence.

its own Chang natural the (4). named. the	同出而異名。同謂之玄。玄之又玄。衆妙之門。 物之母。故常無欲以觀其妙。常有欲以觀其徽。此兩者 道可道。非常道。名可名。非常名。無名天地之始。有名萬 一章	Tao means the Way, and every school of thought has way, system, or truth. Only the teachings of Lao Tzu and Tzu are referred to as Taoist because to them Tao meant the and eternal One. The Taoist Tao is the ultimate causality, nature of the infinite universe, and the nature of all things The Eternal or Great Tao cannot be imagined, defined, or The Tao or One is the source of everything, specifically it is source of the Two (42), yin and yang, being and non-being, manifest and essence, earth and heaven. "To know the origins is initiation into the Tao" (Wu, 2003 (14)). The goal of Taoism is to return to our own simple and primal nature, to return to the root and fulfill our own destiny.
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16

ATTAIN to utmost Emptiness.
 Cling single-heartedly to interior peace.
 While all things are stirring together,
 I only contemplate the Return.
 For flourishing as they do,
 Each of them will return to its root.
 To return to the root is to find peace.
 To find peace is to fulfill one's destiny.
 To fulfill one's destiny is to be constant.
 To know the Constant is called Insight.

If one does not know the Constant,
 One runs blindly into disasters.
 If one knows the Constant,
 One can understand and embrace all.
 If one understands and embraces all,
 One is capable of doing justice.
 To be just is to be kingly;
 To be kingly is to be heavenly;
 To be heavenly is to be one with the Tao;
 To be one with the Tao is to abide forever.
 Such a one will be safe and whole
 Even after the dissolution of his body.

沒身不殆。妄作凶。知常容。容乃公。公乃王。王乃天。天乃道。道乃久。其根。歸根曰靜。是謂復命。復命曰常。知常曰明。不知常。致虛極。守靜篤。萬物並作。吾以觀復。夫物芸芸。各復歸。

十六章

Lao Tzu is totally opposed to the Confucian ideal of humanism, insisting that humanism and sophistication in conflict with nature brings about the evils of the world (18, 38). When the Tao is not followed then the rule of institutions replaces the natural order causing the striving and unhappiness. "The more taboos and inhibitions there are in the world, the poorer the people become" (Wu, 2003 (57)). Cleverness and righteousness pull people away from their natural affections, while shrewdness and profit create ill

feeling and envy in others (19). Lao Tzu questions the definitions of good and bad, or rather who it is who decides what is good or bad. Following the premise of being and non-being, the act of pronouncing something good immediately indicates something other is bad. Something satisfactory will become unsatisfactory when a further achievement or attainment is glorified.

2

WHEN all the world recognizes beauty as beauty, this in itself is ugliness.
When all the world recognizes good as good, this in itself is evil.

Indeed, the hidden and the manifest give birth to each other.
Difficult and easy complement each other.
Long and short exhibit each other.
High and low set measure to each other.
Voice and sound harmonize each other.
Back and front follow each other.

Therefore, the Sage manages his affairs without ado,
And spreads his teaching without talking.
He denies nothing to the teeming things.
He rears them, but lays no claim to them.
He does his work, but sets no store by it.
He accomplishes his task, but does not dwell upon it.

And yet it is just because he does not dwell on it
That nobody can ever take it away from him.

Lao Tzu acknowledges the difficulties in following the Tao as opposed to humanist society. The short-lived happiness of possession usually requires show, and when most are showing their possessions the simple life must seem lacking. The Tao is a long-term, general happiness.

二章
天下皆知美之爲美，斯惡已。皆知善之爲善，斯不善已。
故有無相生，難易相成，長短相較，高下相傾，音聲相和，
前後相隨。是以聖人處無爲之事，行不言之教。萬物作
焉而不辭，生而不有，爲而不恃，功成而弗居。夫唯弗居，
是以不去。

While the humanists struggle and strive daily to achieve short periods of happiness, the Taoist is contented the majority of the time. To be contented one must curb one's desires (19), and "following the Primal Simplicity," the natural way, the Tao, "will alone curb the desires of men" (Wu, 2003 (37)).

20

HAVE done with learning,
And you will have no more vexation.

How great is the difference between "eh" and "o"?
What is the distinction between "good" and "evil"?
Must I fear what others fear?
What abysmal nonsense this is!

All men are joyous and beaming,
As though feasting upon a sacrificial ox,
As though mounting the Spring Terrace;
I alone am placid and give no sign,
Like a babe which has not yet smiled.
I alone am forlorn as one who has no home to return
to.

All men have enough and to spare:
I alone appear to possess nothing.
What a fool I am!
What a muddled mind I have!
All men are bright, bright:
I alone am dim, dim.
All men are sharp, sharp:
I alone am mum, mum!
Bland like the ocean,
Aimless like the wafting gale.

All men settle down in their grooves:
I alone am stubborn and remain outside.
But wherein I am most different from others is
In knowing to take sustenance from my Mother!

To know the true nature of the universe, Lao

Tzu tells us to look inside ourselves (21, 57), and to

be true to our own natures as the Tao is within us. Following the Tao is to be non-competitive, and not seek praise or glory. To do for others, and not for personal gain. To do a job without ado, fuss, or ulterior ambitions. To know when it is enough, "Far better to stop in time!", "When you have done your work, retire!" (Wu, 2003 (9)). To boast of

絕學無憂。唯之與阿。相去幾何。善之與惡。相去若何。人之所畏。不可不畏。荒兮其未央哉。衆人熙熙。如享太牢。如登春臺。我獨泊兮其未兆。如嬰兒之未孩。儻儻兮若無所歸。衆人皆有餘。而我獨若遺。我愚人之心也。哉。沌沌兮。俗人昭昭。我獨昏昏。俗人察察。我獨悶悶。澹兮其若海。颺兮其若無止。衆人皆有以。而我獨頑似鄙。我獨異於人。而貴食母。

二十章

success is to invite contention. The admiration of others for achievement is fleeting and may turn to loathing. Lao Tzu refers to these self-serving motivations as "unwanted food and extraneous growths" (Wu, 2003 (24)).

38

HIGH Virtue is non-virtuous;
Therefore it has Virtue.
Low Virtue never frees itself from virtuousness;
Therefore it has no Virtue.

High Virtue makes no fuss and has no private ends to serve:
Low Virtue not only fusses but has private ends to serve.

High humanity fusses but has no private ends to serve:
High morality not only fusses but has private ends to serve.
High ceremony fusses but finds no response;
Then it tries to enforce itself with rolled-up sleeves.

Failing Tao, man resorts to Virtue.
Failing Virtue, man resorts to humanity.
Failing humanity, man resorts to morality.
Failing morality, man resorts to ceremony.

Now, ceremony is the merest husk of faith and loyalty;
It is the beginning of all confusion and disorder.
As to foreknowledge, it is only the flower of Tao,
And the beginning of folly.

Therefore, the full-grown man sets his heart upon the substance rather than the husk;
Upon the fruit rather than the flower.
Truly, he prefers what is within to what is without.

Taoism is to live in harmony with nature, but this does not mean that we should go and live in the

上德不德，是以有德。下德不失德，是以無德。上德無爲而無以爲，下德爲之，而有以爲。上仁爲之，而無以爲。上義爲之，而有以爲。上禮爲之，而莫之應，則攘臂而扔之。故失道而後德，失德而後仁，失仁而後義，失義而後禮。夫禮者，忠信之薄，而亂之首。前識者，道之華，而愚之始。是以大丈夫處其厚，不居其薄。處其實，不居其華。故去彼取此。

三十八章

woods. The Tao is the nature of the universe, and the nature of everything. Taoism professes non-action, but this does not mean in-action. The Tao is about life, and not about any separation from life. Lao Tzu writes much about kings, rulers, and sages, but he is also referring to the individual. The ideal that one should do things for the good of all and without being seen to be imposing one's personal will or seeking glory is valid throughout social stratum. When only self-interest is served, others will find no value in what is done. Even if the work done is for other's benefit, if recognition of the effort is looked for then the virtue in the work is lost.

41

WHEN a wise scholar hears the Tao,
He practices it diligently.
When a mediocre scholar hears the Tao,
He wavers between belief and unbelief.
When a worthless scholar hears the Tao,
He laughs boisterously at it.
But if such a one does not laugh at it,
The Tao would not be the Tao!

The wise men of old have truly said:

The bright Way looks dim.

The progressive Way looks retrograde.
The smooth Way looks rugged.
High Virtue looks like an abyss.
Great whiteness looks spotted.
Abundant Virtue looks deficient.
Established Virtue looks shabby.
Solid Virtue looks as though melted.
Great squareness has no corners.
Great talents ripen late.
Great sound is silent.
Great Form is shapeless.

The Tao is hidden and nameless;
Yet it alone knows how to render help and to fulfill

道隱無名。夫唯道善貸且成。 偷質真若渝。大方無隅。大器晚成。大音希聲。大象無形。 退夷道若類。上德若谷。大白若辱。廣德若不足。建德若 笑之。不笑。不足以爲道。故建言有之。明道若昧。進道若 上士聞道。勤而行之。中士聞道。若存若亡。下士聞道。大	四十一章
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The main beauty of the Tao Teh Ching is that in general it is quite unspecific so that it is easier to apply to a modern lifestyle. Although there are examples of how to follow the Tao that seem very tough to observe if taken to the letter, if one can manage to do some of the following at least in one's private life, then "he who practices Virtue is one with Virtue" (Wu, 2003 (23)) should still apply.

54

WHAT is well planted cannot be uprooted.
What is well embraced cannot slip away.
Your descendants will carry on the ancestral sacrifice for generations without end.

Cultivate Virtue in your own person,
And it becomes a genuine part of you.
Cultivate it in the family,
And it will abide.
Cultivate it in the community,
And it will live and grow.
Cultivate it in the state,
And it will flourish abundantly.
Cultivate it in the world,
And it will become universal.

Hence, a person must be judged as person;
A family as family;
A community as community;
A state as state;
The world as world.

How do I know about the world?
By what is within me.

Tao is to work for the good of those around you taking nothing for yourself. Tao is to diminish until you have no

善建者不拔。善抱者不脫。子孫以祭祀不輟。修之於身。其德乃真。修之於家。其德乃餘。修之於鄉。其德乃長。修之於國。其德乃豐。修之於天下。其德乃普。故以身觀身。以家觀家。以鄉觀鄉。以國觀國。以天下觀天下。吾何以知天下然哉。以此。

五十四章

private ends to serve and are able to get all work done without requiring any reward or recognition (48). "Be kind to the unkind and faithful to the unfaithful because virtue is kind and faithful" (Wu, 2003 (49)). "Good men are teachers of bad men, while bad men are the charge of good men" (Wu, 2003 (27)). Lao Tzu encourages us to achieve big things by addressing these things at their small beginnings. "A journey of a thousand leagues starts from where your feet stand" (Wu, 2003 (64)) "Difficult things of the world can only be tackled when they are easy" (Wu, 2003 (63)). He also encourages us to look at easy things as difficult so that we are not surprised by difficulties.

51

TAO gives them life,
Virtue nurses them,
Matter shapes them,
Environment perfects them.
Therefore all things without exception worship Tao and
do homage to Virtue.
They have not been commanded to worship Tao and do
homage to Virtue,
But they always do so spontaneously.

It is Tao that gives them life:
It is Virtue that nurses them, grows them, fosters them,
shelters them, comforts them, nourishes them, and
covers them under her wings.

To give life but to claim nothing,
To do your work but to set no store by it,
To be a leader, not a butcher,
This is called hidden Virtue.

Taoism is to live in harmony with the nature of the universe. One may think that today, with all the religions, national legal systems, and local governments that there is so little room for nature left. That with so many who "possess

五十一章
道生之。德畜之。物形之。勢成之。是以萬物莫不尊道而
貴德。道之尊。德之貴。夫莫之命而常自然。故道生之。德
畜之。長之育之。亭之毒之。養之覆之。生而不有。爲而不
恃。長而不宰。是謂玄德。

more riches than they can use! They are the heralds of brigandage!" (Wu, 2003 (53)) there is no room for Tao. Lao Tzu tells us "all things without exception... have not been commanded to worship Tao and do homage to Virtue, but they always do so spontaneously" (Wu, 2003 (51)). This reminds us that although there is little hope that the desires of men will be curbed "and the world will settle down of its own accord" (Wu, 2003 (37)), that Virtue and the Tao will always be seen as good.

Although Lao Tzu is definitely against aggression and self-aggrandizement, he is not a pacifist, and he is well aware of the need for a good defense if only as a last resort. "There is no greater calamity than to underestimate your enemy" (Wu, 2003 (69)). After success "You must rather regret that you had not been able to prevent war" (Wu, 2003 (30)). War "is against Tao, and what is against Tao will soon cease to be" (Wu, 2003 (30)). "'A man of violence will come to a violent end' whoever said this can be my teacher and my father" (Wu, 2003 (42)). Lao Tzu obviously abhorred war, and of all forms of show he hated fine weaponry the most. Following that boasting encouraged contention, Lao Tzu recommends that one does not keep ones arms on show.

36

將欲歛之，必固張之。將欲弱之，必固強之。將欲廢之，必固興之。將欲奪之，必固與之。是謂微明。柔弱勝剛強。魚不可脫於淵。國之利器，不可以示人。	三十六章
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WHAT is in the end to be shrunken,
 Begins by being first stretched out.
 What is in the end to be weakened,
 Begins by being first made strong.
 What is in the end to be thrown down,
 Begins by being first set on high.
 What is in the end to be despoiled,
 Begins by being first richly endowed.

Herein is the subtle wisdom of life:
 The soft and weak overcomes the hard and strong.

Just as the fish must not leave the deeps,
 So the ruler must not display his weapons.

Lao Tzu insists, "The soft and weak overcomes the hard and strong." (Wu, 2003 (36)). That effortlessness is the goal. That to interfere as little as possible is the best course. "The highest type of ruler is one of whose existence the people are barely aware." (Wu, 2003 (17)). Lao Tzu regards water as the "highest form of goodness" as it "knows how to benefit all things without striving with them." (Wu, 2003 (8)). While Lao Tzu encourages softness, weakness, and non-action; he is once again using the paradox that to "To hold on to weakness is to be strong." (Wu, 2003 (52)).

81

SINCERE words are not sweet,
Sweet words are not sincere.
Good men are not argumentative,
The argumentative are not good.
The wise are not erudite,
The erudite are not wise.

The Sage does not take to hoarding.
The more he lives for others, the fuller is his life.
The more he gives, the more he abounds.

The Way of Heaven is to benefit, not to harm.
The Way of the Sage is to do his duty, not to strive
with anyone

八十一章

信言不美。美言不信。善者不辯。辯者不善。知者不博。博者不知。聖人不積。既以爲人已愈。有。既以與人已愈多。天之道利而不害。聖人之道爲而不爭。

and

Within the Tao Teh Ching, there are many beautiful chapters that examine the more mystical areas of Tao, heaven earth, and yin and yang, but I wanted to keep to the more practical side of the Tao. I have said before, because of its

being quite unspecific much of Lao Tzu's wisdom is still relevant today, even to a cynical science type like me. The premise of non-action or non-ado is useful in today's social climate, and non-confrontation is always a good strategy. Non-aggression is, somewhat, a given in modern societies, but it is refreshing to find a philosophy that recognizes the fact that it is necessary to be able to defend oneself. The balance Lao Tzu finds allows a person to be themselves, subject to no standards, requirements, or logic, it also arms them with strategies for avoiding conflicts and achieving big things. High Virtue is an admirable thing, and in any relationship, even a contentious one, it is universally recognized and most often spontaneously remarked upon. Taoism seems to me to be the most workable of all the lifestyle philosophies, probably because being based on nature and non-interference there are so few areas of conflict with other ways of life.



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