Philosophies of Happiness

Chapter 4 Daoism: Supplementary Notes

2. Note that while we are used to the spelling *Tao Te Ching*, the pronunciation is closer to *Daodejing*. The text is traditionally attributed to Laozi, an honorific name that means “Old Master.” He is identified either as 1) Laozi, who is recorded as having conversations with the time of Confucius (around 500 BCE) or 2) a figure named Lao Tan (around 375 BCE), which would put him after Confucius, but before the philosopher Zhuangzi, who lived approximately 365-285 BCE. Many scholars believe the text may have reached something like its present form in the 3rd century BCE (about 225 BCE); this is known as the “received” or Wang Bi version of the text. This text has been called *Tao Te Ching*—the Classic of the Way (*Tao*) and its Power/Virtue (*Te*). Two versions of the text were recently found in a tomb at Mawangdui, which are firmly dated to the second half of the 2nd century BCE. In these texts, the order of the two parts of the text are reversed; the section on *Te* precedes that on *Tao*, so it would properly be called the *Te Tao Ching* (Henricks, tr. *Te-Tao Ching*, xvi-xviii). For an earlier dating of the received text, see however, William H. Baxter, who focuses on the rhetorical patterns and pronunciations of the work itself. He concludes that the text was probably composed around 400 BCE, after Confucius but before Chuang Tzu.

5. Sarah Allan explains that the particle *k'o* suggests that the next term (*dao*) is a verb in the passive, and while it can mean lead or guide, it most likely refers to speaking (and does not mean “walk” in classical Chinese texts). Sarah Allan, Introduction to D.C. Lau, *The Tao Te Ching* (New York: Knopf, 1994), xxii-xxiii. See also Peter A. Boodberg, “Philological Notes on Chapter One of the Lao Tzu, Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies, Vol. 20, No ¾ (Dec 1957), 598-618 at 602, who suggests that the line might be understood as “the *dao* that bears or allows *dao*’ing.” Roger Ames and David Hall translate the first *dao* actively as “way-making;” they nevertheless translate the second ‘*dao*’ in the first line as “put into words” and like most translators, translate the sentence in the passive: “way-making that can be put into words is not really way-making.” Roger Ames and David Hall, *Daodejing: Making This Life Significant, A Philosophical Translation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 77. On *ch’ang*: Addiss and Lombardo, xviii, note that *ch’ang* connotes the reality and constancy of everyday life. Sarah Allen notes likewise that “although the ineffable *tao* is, in a sense, constant or invariant, such constancy encompasses all the regular changes of the natural order.” Sarah Allan, Introduction to D.C. Lau, *The Tao Te Ching* (New York: Knopf, 1994), xxiv. Allan explains that the character *ch’ang* was substituted for *heng* (another word for constant) because of a taboo under the reign of the Han emperor Wen (who reigned 179-156 BCE) whose personal name was Lui Heng (xviii).

6. The discovery of ancient manuscripts of the *Daodejing* at the Mawangdui archeological site in 1973 has shed new light on these two lines. These manuscripts add the particle *ye* after the first three characters and second three characters of the first and second lines: *tao k’o tao ye; fei heng tao ye*. Thus Sarah Allen in her introduction to the new D.C. Lau translation of 1994 writes:

*Ye* indicates a copula. The addition of the grammatical particle makes the grammar more explicit, eliminating ambiguity: A B *ye* means A is B, so the way *is* what can be spoken; and *fei B ye* means [it is] not B (the constant way), as before. Thus, D. C. Lau in his revised translation based on the Ma Wang Tui manuscripts—the translation which we include here—now translates this line and the following one as: The way can be spoken of, but it will not be the constant way; The name can be named, but it will not be the constant name.”

Sarah Allan, Introduction to D.C. Lau, *The Tao Te Ching*, xxviii; xxiii. Robert Henrichs translates the Mawangdui version as: “As for the Way, the Way that can be spoken of is not the constant Way; As for names, the name that can be named is not the constant name.” See Robert Henrichs, *Lao-Tzu: Te-Tao Ching* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 188; for explanation of this grammatical locution, see also
Sarah Allen, *Way of Water*, Sprouts of Virtue (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 16. For detailed discussions of the translation of these lines, see Philip J. Ivanhoe, *The Daodejing*, 101-114; Sarah Allan, Introduction to D.C. Lau, *The Tao Te Ching* (New York: Knopf, 1994), xxi-xxx. In the Mawangdui manuscripts, the phrase “myriad creatures” (wanwu) is also repeated in the third and fourth lines: “The nameless was the beginning of the myriad creatures; the named was the mother of the myriad creatures.” Some scholars believe that “myriad creatures” may have been copied inadvertently. In either reading, there seems to be a two fold process; from the nameless springs either heaven and earth or all the creatures, and from the named, emerge all distinctions and differentiation. See Allen, xxv-xxvi; xxviii-xxix.

12. Translators are mixed in their interpretations; most choose the latter approach. Eno: “There is a thing formed from confusion before heaven and earth were born.” Ivanhoe: “There is a thing confused yet perfect, which arose before Heaven and Earth.” Red Pine: Imagine a nebulous thing here before Heaven and Earth.” Lau: There is a thing confusedly formed, Born before heaven and earth.”

This seems to be a Daoist myth of the emergence of a chaos from the Unnamed, which precedes the fully formed world. Thus, Isabelle Robinet, reflecting on classical Chinese interpreters writes, “The Dao exists before Heaven and Earth, it takes its bearings from ‘another time’ that is not opposed to ‘today.’ From this comes the idea of the slow gestation of the universe from the ‘Mother’ Dao, and of a cosmology often presented in a genealogical mode. Many commentators have had recourse to descriptions of successive genesis that start with Dao or with the void, and through slow progression produce a state of chaotic fusion and the one before giving way to the universe.” Robinet, “The Diverse Interpretations of the Laozi,” 132. Perhaps the text also suggests that the named Dao emerges from the unnamed (Dao). The “thing confusedly formed” that emerges from the nameless may correspond to the “named” in Chapter 1, which is said to be the mother of the myriad living beings. Here, too, the author comments: “it is like the mother of all under heaven, But I don’t know its name—better call it Dao, better call it great.” Thus in both chapters, the nameless gives birth to the named, which is the mother of all creatures. See also Tom Michael, *The Pristine Dao*, 17-31, especially 27; Sarah Allen, *Way of Water*, 76-77.

20. *De* is a term sometimes said to be cognate with “get;” it is the virtue or power that one “gets” from the Dao, the individualizing principle, although this is widely thought to be a false etymology. The Dao is universal and not determined; the *de* is the virtue or power that enables a person to accomplish particular actions. The universal Dao expresses itself in the individual’s *de*. *Dao* is common to all; *de* is that which makes one thing different from others, its distinguishing characteristic. See Burton Watson, Introduction, in *Tao Te Ching*, tr. Addiss and Stanley Lombardo), xiii; Max Kaltenmark, *Lao Tzu and Taoism*, 27-28; Chan, *Way of Lao-Tzu*, 11. The royal *de* was originally the magical effect a Sage cultivated through rites of sacrifice. It came to mean the natural effect a person had on others. The Confucian sage was said to have such a *de*, a kind of moral charisma, that had a powerful effect on the people he ruled; Confucius also suggested that any person could cultivate this kind of moral power. Daoists had a related sense of *de*, as the natural effect the Daoist sage had upon both people and natural beings around them.

29. Allen writes: “philosophically *dao* is a natural course or way, grounded in the imagery of the stream of a river or of the water bubbling up unceasingly from a natural spring. One of the characteristics of water is that it flows in channels and that it always moves downward. From this idea of the *dao*, modeled on the image of a stream with a spring as its sources, its channel acting as a conduit that guides people in their actions, the concept was extended to encompass a condition in which everything in the world follows its natural course.” See Allan, “The Great One, Water, and the Laozi: New Light from Guodian,” *T’oung Pao*, Second Series, Vol. 89, Fasc. 4/5 (2003): 237-285, at 282; and the full-length study in *Way of Water, Sprouts of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).
36. “In the Zhuangzi, wu-wei is associated with the “spiritual rambling” quality of the enlightened person who has overcome the distorting influence of ego-self and is able to experience the totality of things.” Ames, The Art of Rulership, 43. Cited by Alan Fox, “Reflex and Reflectivity,” in Hiding the World, 209.


43. Kjellberg:” Bemused, they wander about beyond the dirt and play at the business of inaction.” Graham: “Heedlessly they go roving beyond the dust and grime, go rambling in the lore in which there is nothing to do.” Fung Yu-Lan: “Unconsciously, they stroll beyond the dirty world and wander in the realm of nonaction.” Chan: “they wander in the original state of having no action.”

47. Kjellberg: How can you expect to wander distant, unrestrained, and rolling paths?” Graham: How are you going to roam that free and easy take-any-turn-you-please path?

48. “Be content with this time and dwell in this order and then neither sorrow nor joy can touch you. In ancient times this was called the “freeing of the bound.” There are those who cannot free themselves, because they are bound by things. But nothing can ever win against Heaven—that’s the way it’s always been. What would I have to resent?” says Master Yu, who muses on other transformations the Creator might take upon him, even transforming his buttocks into cartwheels. Watson, 84-85.

64. Graham: Unify your attention. Rather than listen with the ear, listen with the xin 'heart'. Rather than listen with the heart, listen with the qi, 'energies'. Listening stops at the ear, the heart at what tallies with the thought. As for 'energy', it is the xu 'tenuous', which waits to be roused by other things. Only the Way accumulates the tenuous. The attenuating is the fasting of the heart. . . [When] the channels inward through eyes and ears are cleared, and you expel knowledge from the heart, the ghostly and shen 'daemonic' will come to dwell in you, not to mention all that is human" A.C. Graham, Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters (Cambridge: Hackett, 2001), 68-9.

Slingerland: Unify your intention (zhi). It is better to listen with your heart/mind than to listen with your ears, but better still to listen with your qi than to listen with your heart/mind. Listening stops with the ears and the heart/mind stops with matching things up (fu), but qi is tenuous (xu) and watis upon things. Only the Way will gather in tenuousness. Tenuousness is the fasting of the heart/mind. Effortless Action, 183.

68. “When I first started cutting up oxen, all I looked at for three years was oxen, and yet still I was unable to see all there was to see in an ox. But now I encounter it with the spirit rather than scrutinizing it with the eyes. My understanding consciousness (zhi) beholden to its specific purposes, comes to a halt, and thus the promptings of the spirit begin to flow. Zhuangzi: the Essential Writings, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries, Tr. Brook Ziporyn (Cambridge: Hackett, 2009), 22.

72. “Don’t look and don’t listen; embrace the spirit by means of stillness (bao shen yi jing) and the physical form will correct itself. You must be still and pure (qing); do not belabor your physical form and do not agitate your quintessential (jing). Only then can you live a long life. When the eye does not see, the ear does not hear, and the heart/mind does not know, then your spirit will protect the body, and the body will enjoy long life. Slingerland, 201. On the quintessential (jing), see also a passage from the Inner Training, cited by Slingerland, 200; and see Roth, Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei Yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism, 46 and 101-23.
78. “Whenever I come to a clustered tangle, realizing that it is difficult to do anything about it, I instead restrain myself as if terrified, until my seeing comes to a complete halt. My activity slows, and the blade moves ever so slightly. Then all at once, I find the ox already dismembered at my feet like clumps of soil scattered on the ground. I retract the blade and stand there gazing at my work arrayed all around me, dawdling over it with satisfaction. Then I wipe off the blade and put it away. Ziporyn, 23.

86. Confucius was seeing the sights at Lu-liang, where the water falls from a height of thirty fathoms and races and boils along for forty li, so swift that no fish or other water creature can swim in it. He saw a man dive into the water and, supposing that the man was in some kind of trouble and intended to end his life, he ordered his disciples to line up on the bank and pull the man out. But after the man had gone a couple of hundred paces, he came out of the water and began strolling along the base of the embankment, his hair streaming down, singing a song. Confucius ran after him and said, “At first I thought you were a ghost, but now I see you're a man. May I ask if you have some special way of staying afloat in the water?”

“I have no way (dao). I began with what I was used to, grew up with my nature, and let things come to completion with fate. I go under with the swirls and come out with the eddies, following along the way the water goes and never thinking about myself. That's how I can stay afloat.”

Confucius said, "What do you mean by saying that began with what you were used to, grew up with your nature, and let things come to completion with fate?"

“I was born on the dry land and felt safe on the dry land—that was what I was used to. I grew up with the water and safe in the water-that was my nature. I don’t know why I do what I do—that’s fate.” Chapter 19, “Mastering Life,” tr. Watson, 126.

93. Neuropsychologist Richard Davidson argues that for people who tend to self-distraction, the kind of meditation that can help is one in which one focuses on one word, activity, or object. For people who are hyper focused, the kind of meditation that can be most helpful is one that opens and diffuses awareness, allowing all objects to enter and leave without grasping or focusing. See Davidson, The Emotional Life of Your Brain, and below, Chapter 11. These two forms of awareness may correspond to contrasting practices of meditation such as we find in the later Buddhist tradition: one style is to focus intently on a particular object of meditation while another encourages the meditator not to focus on anything in particular, allowing objects to come and go into the open field of awareness.

112. Brook Ziporyn writes: “The character used for ‘Potter’s Wheel’ also means ‘equality.’ The two meanings converge in the consideration of the even distribution of clay made possible by the constant spinning of the wheel; the potter’s wheel’s very instability, its constant motion, is what makes things equal.” Note also that Chinese cosmology considers Heaven, the sky, to be “rotating”: the stars and constellations turn in the sky, and the seasons—the sky’s various conditions are brought in a cyclical sequence. This turning of the seasons is what makes things exist and grow. The turning of the Potter’s Wheel sky brings life, as the potter’s wheel creates pots. Zhuangzi, 14 note 16. See also Steve Coutinho, “Zhuangzi,” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

119. Kjellberg: “But nothing is completed or injured when they are again comprehend as one. Only the penetrating person knows how to comprehend them as one. Don’t insist but lodge in the usual. The usual is the useful. You can use it to penetrate. When you penetrate, you get it. Get it and you’re almost there. Just go along with things. Doing that without knowing how things are is what I call the Way.” Watson: “No thing is either complete or impaired, but all are made into one again. Only the man of far-reaching vision knows how to make them into one. So he has no use [for categories], but relegates all to the constant. The constant is the useful; the useful is the passable; the passable is the successful; and with
success, all is accomplished. He relies upon this alone, relies upon it and does not know he is doing so. 
This is called the Way.” Note also Chad Hansen, whose analysis is linguistic: “Chuang-tzu notes that 
there is ‘an end’ to that kind of shih-ing and says that when we deal with what comes after that end, we do 
not know ‘what is so of things.’ We christen that ignorance of things ‘tao.’” Hansen claims that Chuang-
tzu does not go beyond skepticism to absolute mysticism. “A Tao of Tao in Chuang-tzu,” 48; *A Daoist 
Theory of Chinese Thought: A Philosophical Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000),
265–72, 285–92; *Chuangzi: A Philosophical Analysis, Interpretive Issues.* Chris Fraser also denies 
mysticism or a monistic dao. Fraser, “Skepticism and Value in the Zhuangzi,” *International 