

DAOISM AND SYSTEMS THEORY

TWO CONVERGING VIEWS

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FACT IS THAT SCIENCE, IN PARTICULAR SYSTEMS THEORY, HAS BY
AND LARGE CONFIRMED TAOIST COSMOLOGY.
WIKIPEDIA

‘THE TAOIST CANNOT BE A ‘PHILOSOPHER’ IN THE WESTERN SENSE,
ESTABLISHING HIS CASE BY RATIONAL ARGUMENT; HE CAN ONLY
GUIDE US IN THE DIRECTION OF THE WAY BY APHORISMS, POETRY
AND PARABLE. THE TALENTS WHICH HE NEEDS ARE THOSE OF AN
ARTIST AND NOT OF A THINKER.’
A.C. GRAHAM, THE BOOK OF LIEH-TZU

ABSTRACT

Ancient Scholarly Daoism, the philosophical school that preceded the later corrupt, vulgarized and worship-obsessed Daoist religion, has proven in hindsight to have had a perfectly systemic and integral view upon nature. It was really unlike ordinary religions that always tended to project intellectual assumptions upon nature. Instead, it was respecting the natural order of things and the *inherent metalogic* of the universe that manifests like a *universal matrix* in all living systems.

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ON EDUCATION

A good education of children cannot be concocted through writing and composing a well-sounding curriculum. It is rather the result of the state of mind and emotional integration of the educators and founders of the school.

Why does Daoism foster a good education of children? The Way of Daoism is non-dogmatic, non-ideological and non-idealistic. It is focused on *what-is*, not on *what-should-be*, and thus is pragmatic and down-to-earth.

BEING ON THE WAY

The developmental pathway is especially stressed in Daoism, or, for that matter, the pathway even without a notable development. In comparison to the ‘Way,’ all goals and achievements are of minor importance; what counts for spiritual progress is the *process*, and the fact to remain moving.

NON-INTERFERENCE

It is essential not to interfere in natural processes. Nature is self-regulated and follows the supreme wisdom of an all-interconnecting matrix that is the blueprint of our universe. This matrix or *dao* creates through a configurational energy called *chi*; this energy is actually an information field.

Natural processes are no random appearances; they are intelligent manifestations of the matrix 'in action' and as such they bear their own meaning and significance. To interfere in them means to replace cosmic wisdom by human willfulness, and the result will be a messing-up of the natural order by creating a *disturbance* in the system.

NO FINAL ILLUMINATION

Daoism does not see spiritual development as an intentional and teleological process that is ‘crowned’ by a result called ‘illumination’ or ‘enlightenment.’

In fact, it can reasonably be doubted if there is at all such a thing as enlightenment or illumination; it would anyway be a static condition and as such it is not considered of any importance in the ‘process-thinking’ so typical for Daoism.

In addition, given that our lives extend over many life cycles or ‘reincarnations,’ it would have only relative value if any such illumination is achieved in a single lifetime. It may namely be limited to the state of mind and the level of spiritual achievement of the aspirant during that particular lifetime, and thus may not bear any significance beyond it.

NO ABSOLUTE TRUTH

Who, with which authority, knowledge or power can possibly ordain the existence of an ‘absolute’ truth? It is quite a hubristic idea, and it has no foundation in nature. There are no ‘absolutes’ in the web of life, all is relative in nature, inter-related, and neuronally linked instead of grouped in up-down hierarchies.

One may also want to remember the times of ‘Absolutism’ in France, under the Sun King Louis XIV; it was a time of extreme social injustice, rampant warfare, and excesses in every possible sense.

And with a punch of humor one may imagine somebody affirming in his right mind that he possesses ‘the absolute truth.’ Stated in public today, it would come over as rather ridiculous.

Contrary to most religions, scholarly Daoism sees truth as *relative*, and in addition does not actually give much importance to the search for truth, given

that when spontaneity is valued and practiced, glimpses of truth occur along the way ... and this is part of the process. So there is no need to preoccupy oneself with the whole concept of 'absolute' verities.

NO GOD. NO SAVIOR. NO FALL.

A god-creator outside of creation is a logical mishap. Who has created the creator? If one needs to assume a god-principle (for some kind of emotional security ...), it is within creation, it is *inherent* in it. The *chi* as the configurational energy matrix fulfills this role perfectly; it is the hologram-creator within a holographic universe.

A savior is needed only when there is a fall. The idea of a fall presupposes something that happened to somehow blemish the perfection of the original creation. What could this possibly be? Certainly not human action for humans do not have the blueprint for immediate reality creation. So man cannot have deteriorated his 'status' on earth through any malefic interference into creation because man does not have the power to do so. (Or humans could create other humans, planets, stars, and so forth).

Hence, logically so, when there was no fall, no savior is needed. Man has no need to be ‘saved’ from anything. He is perfect as he is, perfectly created by the *chi matrix* and maintained in his perfect state.

THE MIDDLE WAY

All extremes bring about strife and further down the road, chaos. They dismantle the internal balance in all of what-is. Nature engages in extremes very carefully. A thunderstorm is very limited in time and scope, so is an earthquake. But despite thunderstorms and earthquakes, there is still a fundamental balance in nature.

CONTEMPLATIVE NON-INVOLVEMENT

Systems research taught us that by observing a living system we are disturbing the system. There is no way technological refinement and subtlety of measurement-taking can avoid this result. Quantum physics is making a definite, finite assumption that the observer is inevitably entangled with the object of observation.

Applying this insight in daily life, we learn what Lao-tzu really meant with the concept of ‘nonaction.’ It should actually be called the imperative of non-interference.

I am applying this concept in my educational project of a New Holistic School as an imperative for teachers to not interfere, by judgment, evaluation or criticism, into the creative manifestations of the children in their care.

SPONTANEOUS EMERGENCE OF BEING

The Dao creates spontaneously. So does a genially gifted artist. So does every creative child when giving the inner and outer space for manifesting creative output.

This phenomenon of emergence should be called ‘the spontaneous emergence of being.’ It is a philosophical concept I created which is based on systems theory: the *universal matrix* that connects all and represents all-that-is creates, maintains and directs all life and all living in the metaverse.

SPONTANEOUS ORDER

Chaos theory has clearly shown that chaos is not disorder, but a specific however unusual genre of order. It is thus order, not random arrangement.

Now, if chaos is already order, then what order is order, if not a deliberate arrangement which is aesthetic, logical, sequential, and in accordance with *Feng Shui*, the law of intelligent arrangement that reflects the harmonious order of *chi*, the cosmic vital energy in its manifestations as either *yang* or *yin*.

SIMPLICITY

One of the main virtues of the sage or Daoist scholar was simplicity. It is emphasized often times in the *Dao De Jing*. But seen from our modern vantage point, what really is simplicity? Does it mean being a simpleton, being uneducated, being crude, and having simplistic opinions?

No. It is none of this. Simplicity is to be seen as the opposite pole of complexity, the deliberate refusal of a convoluted inner setup that emphasizes one's personal sophistication. For the Daoist sage, sophistication was not a virtue, but if ever, only of a mundane value, and by extension, an inferior value.

So what really is simplicity? Are we today assigning any even random positive value to it? Well, modern society does not seem to have integrated it in any way, as consumer culture needs to emphasize the *extreme complexity* of life in order to create more and more needs that it then promises to fulfill through

the creation of ever more consumer goods. While it seems that simplicity is not a value that fosters easy consumption. But it is a value that fosters inner clarity and thereby, an alignment of soul with purpose in life.

When I lead a simple life, I can practice what is called ‘light touch’ in the New Thought vocabulary, which means an attitude that carefully embraces all in life without judging and *without constantly analyzing* circumstances, events, or people.

The convoluted, complex character analyzes all and everything, it is a judgmental character, a separative character, and as a consequence, a moralistic character.

The Daoist character however is essential *non-judgmental and integrative*, while practicing full awareness of all the details of life, including the ugly details. And it refuses the moralistic bias as a matter of full acceptance of all the black and all the white in life, considering as normal the myriad shades of gray.

UNASSUMING TENURE

In alignment with a simple life, the attitude and tenure of the Daoist sage was essential *unassuming*. It was a non-pretentious attitude, a tenure that did not emphasize any personalized values, nor personal assets like self-knowledge, high erudition, a sophisticated lifestyle, or social values like consideration, tact or sensitivity to the needs of others.

Seen from a systems perspective, once again, such an attitude really makes sense. Life is basically unassuming as well, it does not intent to be pretentious or sophisticated. Simplicity can be seen everywhere in nature; while the substance of life is unendingly complex, this complexity paradoxically appears as simplicity.

In genius research, especially with regard to polymaths like Leonardo da Vinci, biographical research has clearly established a similar pattern: the universal genius is highly complex on the psychic

and intellectual levels, but this complexity appears in daily life as simplicity.

HARMONIZING OPPOSITES

While most religions emphasize opposites and even dogmatize them in their eternal either-or ideologies of ‘good-and-bad,’ ‘black-and-white,’ ‘high-and-low’ or ‘spiritual and mundane,’ scholarly Daoism notably embraces opposites and thereby harmonizes them.

This is clearly reflected also in the Chinese concept of *chi*, the configurational energy that manifests as either *yin* or *yang*, thus appearing as an inherent dualism in nature. However, *yin* and *yang* are not two opposite energies, but polarized manifestations of one single vital energy principle called *chi*.

The great advantage of an integrative attitude that embraces opposites is that it facilitates *self-acceptance* in that it can bridge over our internal opposites and thereby can avoid the endless *inner war* that the moralistic, judgmental and religious character is

prone to. Harmonizing opposites is thus a main facilitating approach to realizing long-term *inner peace*.

THE CONFIGURATIONAL ENERGY MATRIX (CHI)

The Chinese do not divide the physical from the spiritual, considering both part of the same larger reality. They call the human energy field or vital energy *chi*; energy practice, the total revitalization of the body, is called *chi kung*, also spelled *qi gong* or *chi gong*, which means something like ‘energy work’ or ‘mastering the energy.’

Paul Dong calls the vital energy ‘empty force’ and writes in his book ‘Empty Force:’

‘However, the greatest challenge is to master one’s own mind and spirit; this is far more difficult to learn than mere physical techniques such as those of conventional martial arts. For the most fascinating element of this ‘power of nothing’ is that it becomes a physical force than can affect others—the most dramatic illustration of the philosophy of achieving harmony with nature through nonresistance.’

—Paul Dong and Thomas Raffill, *Empty Force: The Power of Chi for Self-Defense and Energy Healing*, 2006, Preface by Thomas Raffill, p. x. Paul Dong writes that ‘looking in a large Chinese dictionary, one finds eighty-five meanings listed for chi, p. 1).

Chinese philosophy explains human life with the idea of an energy reservoir that a person receives at birth in the form of *yuan chi* (*primary chi*) and which is stored in certain energy centers in the lower abdomen. However, this human chi is not isolated but in steady exchange with cosmic chi in the form of *tian chi* (*heaven chi*), *di chi* (*earth chi*) and *ying chi* (*nourishment from food and water*).

What results is *zhen chi* (*true chi*) which controls all of life's activities. This chi can also be transmitted to another person for healing purposes, and this without any physical contact needed.

With a scientific perspective in mind, Paul Dong writes:

'Infrasonic sound may be related to some of the injury-producing effects of the empty force. As we know, infrasound is vibration at a very low frequency, inaudible to the human ear; and, although its energy is also very low, some infrasound can injure a person's internal organs, sometimes fatally. To my knowledge, effects of external chi that have been measured by instruments in China include infra-

sound, low-frequency amplitude-modulated infrared radiation, low-frequency magnetic information, particle flow information, visible or super-faint light, and organic ion flow, among others.’ (Id., p. 7)

‘The importance of gamma rays in external chi lies in their ability to destroy cancer cells both on the surface and within the body. (Id., p. 11).

From a psychic perspective and with regard to *personal self-cultivation*, so essential for the scholarly Daoist, Paul Dong writes:

‘Exercising the chi is what the Taoists called the cultivation of jing (essence), chi, and shen (spirit), a kind of ‘internal exercise.’ (Id. p. 16).

Master Lam Kam Chuan writes in his book ‘*The Way of Energy (1991)*:’

‘The Chinese have studied the energy of the human body for thousands of years. This study is one of the earliest activities recorded in human civilization and dates back to the reign of the Yellow Emperor (thought to have been 2690-2590 BC). It continues to expand and develop to this very day. The results form a sophisticated and meticulous body of knowledge bringing together three disciplines usually treated as completely separate in the West: medicine, philosophy, and the martial arts.

氣

Central to the Chinese analysis of energy and its behavior is the concept of Chi (pronounced ‘chee’).

The Chinese character for Chi has several meanings. It can mean ‘air’ or ‘breath,’ but it is most commonly used to represent the concept of ‘energy’ or ‘vital essence.’ In the human body, Chi is the fundamental energy that sustains life and is present in the vibrating biological processes of energy single one of the millions and millions of cells. It drives all the activities throughout the organism. This energy is not uniquely human. Every being shares in and is a natural manifestation of the vast Chi or fundamental energy of the universe. Just as modern science has demonstrated the elegant unity of all matter and energy in the elemental structure and processes of our planet and the known cosmos, so too has the cumulative Chinese understanding of Chi been based on minute observation of a correspondingly delicate and interdependent web of energy patterns flowing through and forming the basis of all that exists.’

—Master Lam Kam Chuen, *The Way of Energy: Mastering the Chinese Art of Internal Strength with Chi Kung Exercise*, 1991, p. 18.

Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming, writes in his book *'The Root of Chinese Qigong (1989, 1997):*

'The Chinese have devoted a large part of their intellectual effort to self-study and self-cultivation in the hope of understanding the meaning of their lives. This inward-feeling and looking, this spiritual searching, has become one of the major roots of Chinese religion and medical science. Qi, the energy within the human body, was studied very carefully.'

—Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming, *The Root of Chinese Qigong: Secrets for Health, Longevity, & Enlightenment* (1989, 1997), p. 3.

The emphasis is on the spiritual, rather than the material life. Contrary to the Western belief that by strengthening the physical body you also improve your health, Chinese philosophy posits the concept of *internal energy balance* as the crucial factor for perfect health, considering exercise that disregards the flow of the *chi*, the internal energy, as not conducive to *long-term health and wellbeing*.

THE WHOLENESS OF LIFE-AND-DEATH

Modern society is characterized by the fact that it has disintegrated death and natural dying from its essential life paradigm. Death is not a conversational subject in modern circles; outside of the helping professions, it is not a subject that is embraced by the social code. In other words, death has been iconoclasted in that it has become anathema. While in all natural tribal societies and native populations, death is subject not only of internal tribal communication, but also an essential motif for art and creative expression. There are death masks, there are death rituals, death statuettes, death utensils, and death dreams.

The only discipline, it seems, that has from the start taken up the long-overdue discussion of death and dying is *psychoanalysis*, and nowadays also psychosomatic and holistic medicine. In these circles, death has even become a popular subject for best-selling books on the more or less hospital-based ritu-

als of dying in humane ways. To remind only of the bestselling books of Raymond Moody about *Near-Death Experiences*, and more recently the books by fashionable physicians like Deepak Chopra or Larry Dossey.

So we can say that again from a systems perspective, we are evolving toward the *wholeness of life-and-death* as a kind of reincarnation of tribal wisdom within our own new-age society, and this is a very good thing to happen and will help many people to embrace the inevitable transition to the astral realms we are all going to embark upon one day.

ENDING PASSION WITHOUT JUDGING DESIRE

As a personal aside, I have been able to end sexual passion without in any way judging desire. It was a natural process that slowly unfolded upon entering my sixties and fully established itself as the new vital pattern at age 65, quite recently actually. So with a note of humor, I need no more ponder what kind of a sexual animal I represent in the labeling system of modern society, as I seem to represent now a non-sexual animal.

Now, from a perspective both of systems theory and scholarly Daoism, this seems to be a rather awkward development. Systems theory shows how the life function is essentially based upon charge and discharge, a sort of body electric that is continually in a state of *pulsation*. And the scholarly Daoists, and even the later religious Daoists, strongly emphasized the *natural vitality of a sexual life* as essential for longevity and good health into old age.

NO RIGHT AND WRONG.
NO BENEFIT AND HARM.

One of the most essential values for the ancient scholarly Daoist was the premise to accept good and bad, favor and disfavor, success and failure, with equal magnanimity. This principle of Daoist philosophy is also called ‘the non-choosing mind.’

The *Dao De Jing* emphasizes in several strophes that *non-choosing* is the only way to ensure inner peace based upon the acceptance of nature and natural life functions. But besides, entire treatises have been written about this philosophical doctrine so typical for ancient Daoism and not to be found as a typical point of rhetoric in other philosophical schools or systems.

We as humans are naturally volitional beings; this has to be seen very clearly, to begin with. Thus a doctrine of ‘non-choosing’ must come over as *artificial* somehow. We choose on a daily, even hourly basis, our meals, our clothes, our itineraries to the office or

social gatherings, our holiday destinations, the gifts we bestow upon others for birthdays and festive events, and so on. We are constantly choosing, and we do this naturally.

I personally find the doctrine of ‘non-choosing’ to be the only ingredient in the soup of the otherwise highly intelligent ancient Daoist lifestyle that is not really based on spontaneous human behavior. So, let me ask, is it a precept of a *moral nature*, then? Well, this is a tricky question as morality is really *not* a point of rhetoric in the entire worldview of the scholarly Daoist.

I understand that being judgmental, or moralistic, is not conducive to inner peace, and also in interpersonal relations fosters antagonism instead of harmonious dialogue and cooperation. But ‘non-choosing’ goes far beyond the non-judgmental quest, it seems to me! Let us only consider one rather notorious pair of opposites so dear to modern life: the pair of ‘success’ and ‘failure.’ Thinking of modern self-coaching

literature and here especially an author like Napoleon Hill, the theme really boils down to loving success and hating failure, and getting into an almost obsessional drive for ‘becoming a personal success.’

I remember when I was a student in the first semester of my law studies, I met a French girl who asked me if I was considering myself as ‘a success.’ She said:

—*Tu penses que tu es une réussite?*

I was so flabbergasted at the question that I could not answer for a while. Finally I replied that I did not know or what rather answer to the negative.

Later in life, having been blessed by destiny with but failures, recurring failures and absolutely no success even into my advanced age, I must confess that I have become ambiguous about what success actually means. There are many books published in recent years that tell ‘success stories’ of business people who were considered by the social framework as ‘great successes’ but who were actually leading miserable

lives and having miserable relationships. Thus the authors of those books continue to ask the pertinent question, what is actually *real* success—the one that brings health, inner peace, and mutually satisfying and growth-fostering relationships?

We have become more knowledgeable in the meantime how real success differs from the success preached so eloquently by our great success coaches. For the anecdote, Napoleon Hill, at one point in his earlier years, lost all his accumulated fortune and had to restart his ‘successful’ life from scratch.

But to get back at the doctrine of ‘non-choosing,’ can we thus deduct from modern success research that the right way is to *not consider* success at all as something desirable in life? It seems to me that this is indeed the somewhat extreme position of the ancient Daoist scholar, and is expressed in sometimes rather extremist terms in the *Dao De Jing*.

I would argue that such a doctrine is in contradiction to the principle of *simplicity* that is equally a

fundamental of Daoist doctrine. Simplicity namely also means *naturalness and spontaneity*. And the natural and spontaneous attitude in life, and here just see it even more pronounced with natural children, is to *choose*, at every moment, in every circumstance, and at any age of the person.

And ... to end this somewhat scholarly article with a personal statement, this contradiction is really *not the only one* I have discovered in scholarly Daoism and even more so in religious Daoism which is why, after all, I prefer to write in the future about autonomous Christianity as the doctrine of the liberal modern philosopher who is born in the West and lives in the West.

Daoism is certainly a most beautiful doctrine and philosophy, but please let us consider how it fits into modern-day China? *It does not fit at all*. It was liberal, while China is doctrinaire, it was freedom-loving while China is a police state, it was nature-loving, while China has destroyed its natural habitat and

created hitherto unseen levels of water and air pollution. And last not least, it was favoring with its integral and systemic philosophy a national economy that is based upon a free market, and a freely floating exchange rate. While China has opted for a planned economy and tight control and supervision of financial transactions, not trusting the inherent relative goodness of the human being that is so much a constant in the ancient scholarly Daoist philosophy!