

# Terebess Asia Online (TAO)

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## The Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu

**Translated by Chad Hansen**

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1.           ide with Names

To           , what can be guided is not constant guiding.

To name what can be named is not constant naming.

'Not-exist' names the beginning (boundary) of the cosmos (Heaven and earth)  
'Exists' names the mother of the ten-thousand natural kinds .  
Thus, to treat 'not-exist' as constant is desiring to use it to view its mysteries.  
To treat 'exists' as constant is desiring to use it to view its manifestations.  
These two emerge together yet have different names.  
'Together'--call that 'obscure. ' 'Obscure' it and it is more obscure.  
. . . the gateway of a crowd of mysteries.

## 2. Contrast of Terms

That the social world knows to deem the beautiful as 'beautiful' simply creates the 'ugly. '  
That the social world knows to deem worth as 'worthy' simply creates 'worthlessness. '  
Thus 'exists' and 'not-exists' mutually sprout. 'Difficult' and 'easy' are mutually done.  
'Long' and 'short' are mutually gauged. 'High' and 'low' mutually incline.  
'Sound' and 'tone' mutually blend. 'Before' and 'after' mutually supervene.  
(Pro-sage Commentary:)  
Using this: sages fix social issues without deeming ; administer a 'no words' teaching.  
The ten-thousand natural kinds work by it and don't make phrases. They sprout but don't  
'exist'. Deem-act and don't rely on anything. Accomplish their work and don't dwell in it.  
Because they don't dwell in it, they don't lose it.

## 3. Prescriptions for Politics

Don't glorify the high-brow: cause people not to wrangle.  
Don't value limited commodities: cause people not to contemplate stealing.  
Don't display the desirable: prevent confusing the people's hearts-'n-minds.  
Using these: The governance of sages: empties their hearts-'n-minds, stuffs their guts  
Weakens their resolve, and strengthens their bones.  
He treats causing the people to lack both knowledge and desire as constants.  
Causing those with knowledge not to venture deeming-actions.  
They deem the absence of deeming-action and thus nothing is ungoverned.

## 4. Using Guidance

Guidance pours out but in using it, something is not filled.  
Whew! It's like the ancestor of the ten-thousand natural kinds.  
'Dull' its 'sharp', 'untie' its 'tie', 'blend' its 'bright', 'together' its 'diffused particles'.  
Ooo! It's like it partly endures.  
I don't know whose son it is.  
It is before the emperor of signs!

## 5. Natural Guidance

Heaven-earth [the cosmos] is not kind. It treats the 10,000 natural kinds as straw dogs.  
Sages are not kind. They treat the hundred surname-groups as straw dogs.  
Is the space between Heaven and earth not like bellows and flutes?  
Empty and not warped.  
As you move them, they produce.  
Words and numbers unlimited are not as good as holding the center.

## **6. The Superiority of the Female**

**The Valley energy never dies.**

**This is called 'fathomless female'**

**The channel of the fathomless female:**

**This is called the basis of the cosmos.**

**Silken! It's as if it abides.**

**Handle it gently!**

## **7. Intentional Reversal**

**Heaven is old and Earth is enduring.**

**What do Heaven and Earth rely on in order to be old and enduring?**

**They rely on avoiding self creation.**

**Hence they can be old and enduring.**

**Using this: Sages 'later' themselves and yet they comes first.**

**They 'outside' themselves and yet they abide.**

**Is this not a case of their lacking selfishness?**

**So they are able to achieve their selfishness.**

## **8. The Worth of Water**

**Higher worth is like water.**

**Water is good at benefiting the ten-thousand natural kinds**

**Without wrangling for position.**

**What the crowd despises**

**Hence close to the guide.**

**In dwelling value the earth.**

**In heart-mind value depth.**

**In being-with value kindness.**

**In words value reliability.**

**In rectifying value order.**

**In social affairs value ability.**

**In action value timing.**

**In general, simply don't wrangle**

**Hence have no indiscretion.**

## **9. The inconstancy of achievement**

**To grasp and pile things up is not as good as regarding it as already done.**

**When you measure and build a pillar , you cannot preserve it for long.**

**When gold and jade fill the hall, you can't keep any of it.**

**Rich, ennobled and thus proud bequeaths ruin.**

**With success, disappear: this is the heavenly guide.**

## **10. Impossible Advice**

**Impossible:**

**In embracing your vitalities, embracing in one, can you fail to distinguish?**

**In specializing in breath and consummating weakness, can you be a child?**

In cleansing and voiding your profound mirror, can you be without flaw?  
In loving the people and ordering the state, can you fail to know?  
In opening and closing the heavenly channel, can you fail to be female?  
In discerning all within the four directions, can you fail to deem-act?  
Generate it, nourish it:  
Generate it and not 'exist' it.  
Deem: act and not rely on anything.  
Become 'elder' and not rule.  
These are called 'profound virtuosities.'

#### 11. The Value of Non-existence

Thirty spokes together make one hub.  
Where the nothing is, lies the cart's use.  
Throwing clay to deem: make a utensil;  
Where the nothing is, lies the utensil's use.  
Sculpting windows and doors to deem: make a room;  
Where the nothing is, lies the room's use.  
So where we deem having it as beneficial.  
We deem use to consist in lacking it.

#### 12. The Numbing Effect of the Conventional

The five colors stupefy the people's eyes.  
The five tones desensitize the people's ears.  
The five flavors numb the people's mouths.  
Horse races and hunting derange the people's heart-minds.  
Hard to get goods pervert the people's behavior.  
Using this: Sages deem: act for the gut not the eye.  
So they choose this and reject that.

#### 13. Status

Favor is as disgraceful as a warning.  
Nobility is as great a trouble as a self.  
Why say 'favor is as disgraceful as a warning'?  
The favored is deemed below.  
Receiving it is like a warning.  
Losing it is like a warning.  
This is called 'favor is as disgraceful as a warning.'  
Why say 'nobility is as great a trouble as a self'?  
Deeming I have a self is what makes it possible for me have trouble.  
and if I had no self, what trouble could I have?  
Hence nobility is regarding your self as the social world.  
To the likes of that, the social world can be delivered.  
[Nobility's] love regards the self as the social world.  
To the likes of that, the social world can be entrusted.

#### 14. Metaphysical Issues

Look at it and fail to see: its name is 'remote.'  
Listen to it and fail to hear: its name is 'diffuse.'  
Feel it and fail to get anything: its name is 'subtle.'  
This threesome cannot be exhaustively probed for portents.  
Hence we blend them and deem them as one.  
Its height is not sparkling.  
Its depth is not murky.  
String-like, it cannot be named.  
It reverts to being no natural kind.  
This we call the condition of being in no condition; the sign of no natural kind.  
This we call 'confused' and 'indistinct.'  
Facing it you cannot see its head; Following it you cannot see its rear  
If you grasp guiding discourse from ancient times in dealing with today's reality  
you can know the ancient beginnings.  
This is called a guiding discourse's record.

### 15. Mastering Guiding Discourse

Those in ancient times who were good at deem: acting as scholars  
Were subtlety mysterious and profoundly receptive  
Unfathomably deep.  
Now, precisely because unfathomable,  
We must force a description of them.  
Cautious: like crossing a stream in winter.  
Ambivalent: like fearing those on all sides.  
Exacting: like being a guest  
Mutable: like ice on the point of melting  
Unaffected: like uncarved wood.  
Munificent: like a valley  
Obscure: like muddied water  
Who can, while muddy, using calmness gradually become clear?  
Who can, while at ease, using activity gradually come to life?  
She who embraces this guiding discourse  
doesn't desire fulfilling.  
Now precisely because not fulfilled,  
she can obscure and not newly fabricate.

### 16. Being a Guide

Go to the limit of emptiness  
Take on quiet dependability  
The ten-thousand natural kinds are all dealt with.  
And I thus view their response  
In general, natural kinds flourish.  
Each responds by returning to its root.  
Returning to the root is called quietude.  
This is called responding to the word.  
Responding to the word we describe as 'constant'.  
To know what is constant we describe as 'discernment'.  
Not to know what is constant is wantonly taking risks.

To know what is constant is openness;  
Open thus equitable;  
Equitable thus kingly;  
Kingly thus natural;  
Natural thus guiding;  
Guiding thus enduring  
Doesn't stop when you bury the body.

#### 17. Politics

The best hierarchy is one those below realize is there.  
Next to that  
is one that you feel kin to and extol.  
Next to that  
is one you dread.  
Next to that  
is one you condemn.  
When reliability is inadequate in it  
There will be unreliability in it.  
Reflectively! His ennobling of language.  
Works are completed; affairs proceed  
And the hundred surnames all call this 'our nature (our own doing)'

#### 18. The Origin of Ethical Concepts

When the great guide is cast aside you will have 'humanity' and 'morality.'  
When intuitive wisdom emerges you will have great artifice.  
When great kinship is not in harmony, you will have 'filiality' and 'affection.'  
When states and great families sink and become deranged, you will have 'loyal ministers.'

#### 19. Argument for Ethical Anarchism

Terminate 'sageliness', junk 'wisdom'  
the people will benefit a hundred-fold.  
Terminate 'humanity', junk 'morality'  
the people will respond with 'filiality' and 'affection.'  
Terminate 'artistry', junk 'benefit'  
thieves and robbers will lack 'existence'.  
These three  
taken as slogans are insufficient.  
Hence, leads us to postulate that to which they belong.  
Visualize simplicity and embrace uncarved wood.  
Downgrade 'selfishness' and diminish 'desire.'  
Terminate learning and you will lack irritation.

#### 20. Left without Language

Huh separates  
'U' and 'Huh uh'?  
What is the separation like between

'worthy' and 'vile'?  
What humans fear  
cannot not be feared.  
Futile! Not focused yet.  
The crowd festive  
--like enjoying an Easter picnic  
or on an Easter sunrise hike.  
I, alone, am placid--it's portent not yet clear.  
Like an infant not yet a baby.  
Languorous!  
Like having no refuge.  
The crowd all have plenty  
I alone treat it as loss.  
Mine is the heart-mind of the stupid, indeed.  
Indiscriminate!  
People of custom are lustrous,  
I alone am dull.  
People of custom are critically discriminating;  
I alone obfuscate.  
Bland! It's like the ocean;  
drifting! like I have no place to stop.  
The crowd all have the-capacity-to  
and I alone am dallying and wanton.  
I alone am different from humans,  
and value nursing at Mother's breast.

## 21. Guiding and the Physical

The content of permeating virtuosity  
is merely following a guide.  
To deem guides as a natural kind:  
Indeed confused! Indeed indistinct!  
Indistinct! Confused!  
Within them there are signs.  
Confused! Indistinct!  
Within them there are natural kinds.  
Yawning! Murky!  
Within them there is generative energy.  
Their energy is optimally authentic.  
Within it there is reliability.  
From the past to the present  
it's name remains.  
And elucidates the crowd's honored father.  
How do I know the shape of the crowd's honored father?  
With this.

2: Point to Reversal?  
If 'dented' then 'intact'  
If 'twisted' then 'straight'

If 'vacuous' then 'filled'  
If 'worn out' then 'new'  
If 'deficient' then 'endowed'  
If 'endowed' then 'confounded'  
Using this: Sages embrace one  
and deem it the social world's model.  
He doesn't see by himself hence is perceptive.  
Doesn't affirm himself hence is discerning.  
Doesn't attack by himself hence has success.  
Doesn't esteem himself hence becomes an elder.  
In general: he does not dispute  
hence in the social world none is able to dispute with him.  
The ancients who said 'If 'crooked' then 'intact'--  
could they have offered empty words?  
Take 'intact' as sincere and return to it.

### 23. The Constancy of Guiding Concepts

Rare language is our own doing.  
Hence a twisting wind does not end the morning.  
A sudden storm does not end the day.  
What makes these the case?--the cosmos.  
The cosmos can raise it but cannot make it endure.  
How much more is this the case with the human realm?  
Hence those who pursue affairs with 'guidance'  
Those of 'guidance,' join in guidance.  
Those of 'virtuosity,' join in virtuosity.  
Those of 'loss,' join in loss.  
Those who join in guidance, guidance is pleased to get them.  
Those who join in virtuosity, virtuosity is pleased to get them.  
Those who join in loss, loss is pleased to get them.  
When reliability is inadequate in it  
There will be unreliability in it.

### 24. Important distinctions

Those who tiptoe do not stand.  
Those who stride do not walk.  
Those who see for themselves are not discerning.  
Those who affirm for themselves are not insightful.  
Those who attack themselves do not achieve.  
Those who esteem themselves do not become elders.  
When these are in guides, we say:  
'Excess provision; redundant action.'  
Some natural kinds avoid them.  
Hence those who have guides don't place them.

2!            t's behind it all?  
Tl            a thing-kind made up of a mix.  
It emerges before the cosmos.



Solitary! Inchoate!  
Self grounded and unchanging.  
Permeating all processes without extremity.  
We can deem it the mother of the social world.  
I don't know its name. When put in characters we say dao.  
Forced to deem it as named, we say 'great.'  
Being great, we say 'comprehensive.'  
Being comprehensive, we say 'far reaching.'  
Being far reaching, we say 'reverting.'  
So our dao is great;  
Nature (heaven) is great,  
Earth is great,  
and kings are also great.  
Within a region are four 'greats.'  
And the King occupies one of those [lofty] statuses.  
Humans treat earth as a standard.  
Earth treats constant nature as a standard.  
Constant nature treats dao as a standard.  
Dao treats being so of itself as a standard.

## 26. Ambiguous Reversals

Deem 'heavy' as root of 'light'  
Deem 'calm' as lord of 'uproar'.  
Using this: Sages pass the whole day in activity  
and never separate from his heavy provisions cart.  
Even though he has an sublime views,  
surpassing those where swallows dwell.  
What do we say, then,  
of the 10,000 chariot ruler  
who, based on the self, 'lights' the social world?  
To 'light' is to lose the root.  
To 'uproar' is to lose the lord.

## 27. Paradoxes of the Greatest Skill

Worthy travel lacks ruts and footprints.  
Worthy language lacks flaws and reproach.  
Worthy tallying doesn't use algorithms.  
Worthy closing lacks bars and bolts  
and still can't be opened.  
Worthy securing lacks rope or restraint  
and still can't be loosed.  
Using this: Sages take saving humanity as a constant  
hence don't abandon humans  
take saving thing-kinds as a constant,  
therefore don't abandon thing-kinds.  
Civilians lack 'bushwhacking discernment.'  
Hence those who are worthy  
are the instructors of the unworthy

The unworthy  
are the stuff of the worthy.  
'Don't value their instructor,  
don't love their stuff'  
Even the wise are greatly puzzled  
Call this "the necessary mystery."

## 28. Opposites and Primitivism

To know its 'male'  
and preserve its 'female'  
is to act as the world's ravine.  
To act as the world's ravine,  
treat virtuosity as constant, and avoid separating  
is to return to infancy.  
To know its 'white'  
and preserve its 'black'  
is to act as the world's paradigm.  
To act as the world's paradigm,  
treat virtuosity as constant and avoid lapses  
is to return to the negative ultimate.  
To know its 'sublime'  
and preserve its 'disgraced'  
is to act as the world's valley.  
To act as the world's valley,  
treating virtuosity as constant is sufficient  
to return to uncarved wood.  
If wood is split then it is deemed an artifact.  
Sages use it  
and they are deemed officials and elders.  
Thus great systems don't cut.

## 29. Deeming

Those who desire to take the social world and deem-act it,  
I see that they just don't get it.  
The social world is an energized artifact.  
It is not the case that it can be deemed.  
Those who deem-act crush it.  
Those who grasp lose it.  
Hence, among natural kinds sometimes act,  
sometimes conform.  
sometimes snort  
sometimes blow.  
sometimes be strong  
sometimes weak.  
sometimes control  
sometimes destroy.  
Use is: Sages abandon superlatives,

abandon extravagance,  
abandon expansiveness.

### 30. Government without Coercion

Those who use a guide to help the ruling class  
should not coerce the social world with arms.  
Social affairs are highly reciprocal.  
Where you place a division,  
thorns and briars grow.  
In the wake of a great army  
inevitably lies years of calamities.  
Skill bears fruit --period!  
Do not presume, in view of that, to choose coercion.  
Have effects and avoid regard.  
Have effects and avoid assault.  
Have effects and avoid pride.  
Have effects and treat it as inevitable.  
Have effects and avoid coercion.  
Natural kinds are robust--then they get old.  
This is called 'don't guide.'  
Practice 'don't guide' early!

### 31. Military Strategies as Guides

In general, splendid martial force  
is an inauspicious artifact.  
Among natural kinds some eschew them.  
Hence some guides don't place them.  
If the 'superior gentleman' is in place then we value the left.  
If we use martial force then we value the right.  
Martial force  
is an inauspicious artifact.  
It is not an artifact of the 'superior gentleman.'  
When you have no choice and use it,  
deem detachment the better attitude.  
When victorious don't treat it as glorious.  
Those who glorify it--  
that is to take satisfaction in killing.  
If you take satisfaction in killing,  
you cannot take that as filling the intent of the social world.  
Auspicious affairs favor the left,  
inauspicious the right.  
The lower-rank general is on the left  
and the higher rank on the right.  
These words amount to arranging them according to the funeral rite.  
Killing--peoples in crowds,  
w or them in bitter grief.  
W tory in war we arrange things according to the funeral rite.

### 32. A Natural Guide.

Guide by treating nameless uncarved wood as constant.  
Although small,  
none in the social world can treat it as vassal.  
If fief-holding kings could embrace it,  
all the natural kinds would come to self conformity.  
Heaven and earth mutually coalesce to rain down sweet dew.  
The people, no one ordering them, self balance.  
To begin to restrain you have names.  
As soon as you have names then,  
in general, you must also come to know to stop.  
If you know to stop, you can avoid danger.  
Compare this guide's being in the social world  
to the relation of brook valleys to rivers and oceans.

### 33. Achievable goals.

Those who know the human are wise.  
The self-knowing are discerning.  
Those who triumph among the human have power.  
The self-triumphing are coercive.  
Those who know sufficiency are affluent.  
Those who coercively act have will.  
Those who don't lose their 'that-which' are long-lasting  
Those who die and don't disappear are long-lived.

### 34. The Great Guide

The great guide is everywhere!  
Thus it can 'left' the 'right.'  
The ten-thousand natural kinds depend on it and thus live.  
And it does not phrase its guidance.  
Success is achieved and not named as 'having.'  
Supports and nourishes the ten-thousand natural kinds  
and does not deem-act as lord.  
Treating lack of desire as constant;  
it can be named in the direction of 'small.'  
The ten-thousand natural kinds return to it  
and it does not deem-act as lord.  
It can be named as 'great.'  
With its ultimately not self-deeming as 'great'  
Hence it is able to achieve its 'great.'

### 35. Great Guiding Signs?

Great great signs.  
The natural world moves.  
If it moves and does not harm,  
the comfort and balance is supreme.

Concerts and feasts  
bring passing guests to a halt.  
Guidance coming out of the mouth.  
Isn't it bland? It lacks flavor.  
Looking at it, it is not visible.  
Listen to it, it is not audible.  
Use it, it is not applicable.

### 36. Natural Reversals

On the point of desiring to contract it,  
you must regard it as inherently expanded.  
On the point of desiring to weaken it,  
you must regard it as inherently strong.  
On the point of desiring to dissipate it,  
you must regard it as inherently thriving.  
On the point of desiring to steal it,  
you must regard it as inherently belonging.  
This is called minute discernment.  
Soft and pliant triumph over hard and coercive.  
Fish cannot leave the abyss.  
The state's beneficial artifacts  
cannot be shown to people.

### 37. Non-Deeming Action

Some guide treats lacking deeming-action as a constant  
yet everything is deem-acted.  
If fief-holding kings could preserve this,  
all the natural kinds would come to self transformation.  
If they transform and desire to construct,  
I will mollify them with the nameless uncarved wood.  
Nameless uncarved wood is,  
in general also being on the point of lacking desires.  
If we use not desiring to get calm,  
the social world will be on the point of self-fixing.

Book II

De  
virtuosity

### 38. Consequences for Virtuosity

Superior virtuosity does not 'virtuosity.'  
For that reason it has virtuosity.  
Inferior virtuosity never forgets 'virtuosity'  
For that reason it lacks virtuosity.  
Superior virtuosity lacks deeming action  
as that with which to deem.  
Inferior virtue deems it  
and has something with which to deem.

Superior humanity deems it  
and lacks that with which it deems.  
Superior morality deems it  
and has that with which it deems.  
Superior conventionality deem it  
and nothing answers.  
So it raises its arm and throws it.  
Hence we lose the guide and then virtuosity.  
Lose virtuosity and then humanity.  
Lose humanity and then morality.  
Lose morality and then conventionality.  
In general conventionality  
is the thinning of fealty and trustworthiness  
and the forerunner of disorder.  
Those who realize first  
take elaboration of guides  
as the beginning of making them stupid.  
For this reason, mature men  
place emphasis on the thick  
and do not dwell on the thin.  
Place emphasis on the stuff  
and don't dwell on the elaboration.  
So they discard this and choose that.

### 39. Achieving Oneness

Things which from the beginning have achieved oneness:  
Heaven achieves oneness in being clear.  
Earth achieves oneness in stability.  
Energy achieves oneness in spirit.  
Valleys achieve oneness in filling.  
The ten-thousand natural kinds achieve oneness in life.  
Fiefholders and Kings achieve oneness in deem-acting to make the social world correct.  
They take it to the extreme.  
When heaven lacks that with which to become clear,  
we're on the point of fearing splitting.  
When earth lacks that with which to become stable,  
we're on the point of fearing spreading out.  
When energy lacks that with which to become spirit,  
we're on the point of fearing death.  
When valleys lack that with which to become full,  
we're on the point of fearing depletion.  
When the ten-thousand natural kinds lack that with which to become alive,  
we're on the point of fearing extinction.  
When fiefholders and kings lack that with which to become noble and exalted,  
we're on the point of fearing toppling.  
Heaven the noble uses the plebeian as its base.  
The noble uses the low as its foundation.  
Upper class: Fiefholders and kings refer to themselves as 'this orphan,' 'this lonely one,' and  
'this impoverished one.'

Is this not taking the plebeian as the base?  
It's not?!  
Hence the extreme of numbering chariots is zero chariots.  
Don't desire to colored veneer of jade  
or the solid dullness of a rock.

#### 40. Reversal

That which is converse is the action of a guide.  
That which is weak is the use of a guide.  
The cosmos and the ten-thousand natural kinds arise from 'existing.'  
'Existing' arises from 'non-existing.'

#### 41. Playing with Reversal

The 'superior' scholar hears a guide.  
He gets all serious and follows it.  
The 'medium' scholar hears a guide.  
It's like it endures; it's like it disappears!  
The 'lower' scholar hears a guide.  
He hilariously laughs at it.  
If he did not laugh, it would not be up to being deemed a guide.  
Hence, as the saying goes--  
A discerning guide is like a murky one.  
An guide to advancing is like one to retreating.  
A guide to leveling is like one to roughing up.  
'Superior' virtuosity is like a valley.  
The greatest 'white' is like filthy.  
'Expansive' virtuosity is like 'insufficient.'  
'Creating' virtuosity is like 'stealing.'  
'Solid authenticity' is like 'sliminess.'  
The greatest square has no corners.  
The greatest artifact is never finished.  
The greatest note rarely sounds.  
The greatest sign lacks shape.  
Guides hide the lack of names.  
In general only guides are good at adopting and also completing.

#### 42. Generating Things

A guide generates 'one.'  
'One' generates 'two.'  
'Two' generates 'three.'  
'Three' generates the ten-thousand natural kinds.  
The ten-thousand natural kinds bear Yin and embrace Yang.  
Blend the life-forces and deem-make 'harmony.'  
What humans revile  
is naturally 'orphan,' 'lonely' and 'impoverished.'  
Yin and Dukes deem them as titles.  
Hence among natural kinds: sometimes you diminish it and it increases.

Sometime you increase it and it diminishes.  
What humans teach,  
I also teach.  
Those who force issues don't get their death.  
I'm on the point of deeming this 'the father of teaching.'

#### 43. Absolute Negation

The most yielding in the social world  
gallops over the most firm in the social world.  
That which lacks being enters into that which lacks space.  
I, with this, know the advantage of lacking deem-acting.  
The teaching that is not put in language,  
The advantage of lacking deem-acting,  
In the social world, these are rarely achieved.

#### 44. Moderate Values

Your name or your self--which is closest to you?  
Your self and commodities--which counts as more?  
Obtaining and losing--which is a defect?  
For this reason, superlative love certainly has great cost.  
Much storage certainly increases losses.  
Knowing to 'sufficient' does not disgrace.  
Knowing to 'stop' does not endanger.'  
You can endure longer.

#### 45. Extremes and Reversals

Great completion is like deficiency.  
Its use does not 'corrupt'.  
Great filling is like being poured.  
Its use does not exhaust.  
Great straightforwardness is like being bent.  
Great skill is like clumsiness.  
Great distinction-debating is like shouting.  
Exercise conquers a chill.  
Rest conquers a fever.  
'Clear' and 'quiet' are deemed as correct for the social world.

#### 46. Guiding Contentment

When the social world has a guide  
We turn back fast horses in order to fertilize.  
When the social world lacks a guide  
War horses are produced in the suburbs.  
Among bad omens, none is greater than not knowing to 'sufficient.'  
Among evils, none is greater than desiring 'getting.'  
He knowing to 'sufficient' is sufficient  
for constant sufficiency.



#### **47. Ignorant Guides.**

**Don't step outside your door. Know the social world.**

**Don't look out the window. See the natural guide.**

**The farther you go**

**the less you know what to do.**

**Using this: Sages don't go anywhere and yet know what to do.**

**Don't see and yet name things.**

**Don't deem-act and yet accomplish.**

#### **48. Forgetting**

**In deem-acting on 'study' one daily increases.**

**In deem-acting on 'the guide ' one daily decreases.**

**Decrease it and further decrease it.**

**In order to arrive at no deem-acting.**

**No deem-acting and nothing not deem-acted.**

**Taking the social world , you treat relying on lacking social acts as constant.**

**When it comes to engaging in social acts,**

**it is not sufficient for taking the social world.**

#### **49. Sage's Constancy**

**Sages lack a constant heart-mind;**

**they deem the public's heart-mind as heart-mind.**

**Things which are worthy, I 'worthy'.**

**Things which are unworthy, I also 'worthy'**

**This treats 'worthy'-ing as a virtuosity.**

**Things which are reliable, I 'reliable'.**

**Things which are unreliable, I also 'reliable'**

**This treats 'reliable'-ing as a virtuosity.**

**A sage in the social world is like an outcast.**

**Deem-acting for the social world, he addles his heart-mind.**

**Sages all 'child' themselves.**

#### **50. Fantasies of Avoiding Death**

**We emerge into life and enter into death.**

**Of life's associates, ten have three.**

**Of death's associates, ten have three.**

**People's being alive, death ground's activities  
also ten have three.**

**Now, why is this?**

**Because they 'life' the thickness of life.**

**In general, when we hear about those worthy to abet life:**

**They walk the earth without encountering rhinoceros or tiger.**

**They enter the army and don't bear armor or weapons.**

**The rhinoceros has no place to thrust its horn.**

**It has no place to wield its claws.**

**And have no place to accommodate their points.**

Now, why is this?  
Because they lack death's ground.

## 51. Natural Guides and Natural Virtuosity

A guide starts it,  
virtuosity cultivates it,  
Natural kinds model it  
and circumstances complete it.  
For this reason, among the ten-thousand natural kinds,  
None fail to respect a guide and value virtuosity.  
This respecting of guides  
and valuing of virtuosity  
is not, in general, commanded in words instead it treats self-so-ing as constant.  
Hence a guide starts it,  
virtuosity cultivates it,  
Acts as its elder, educates it,  
shades it, poisons it,  
nourishes it and returns it.  
Gives rise to and not 'exist,'  
Deem:act and not rely on anything.  
Acts as elder and does not rule.  
This would be called 'profound virtuosity.'

## 52. So What?

The social world has a beginning  
We deem it 'mother' of the social world.  
Since we acquired its 'mother'  
We use that to know its 'son'  
Since we know its 'son'  
We revert to embracing its mother.  
Burying the self we risk nothing.  
Shut up its exchanges ,  
close its gates  
and end life without struggle.  
Open its exchanges,  
benefit its social affairs  
and still end life without saving anything.  
see small, say 'discernible'  
protect weakness, say 'coerce'  
Use its light;  
Revert and return to its discernment.  
Bequeath yourself no trouble;  
Deem this to be rehearsing the constant.

5: easing evidence  
L: suddenly have some know-how  
To exercise on The Great Guide--

Only helping it--this I fear!  
The Great Guide is profoundly smooth  
and people easily track it.  
The palace is profoundly stripped.  
Fields are profoundly overgrown.  
Granaries are profoundly bare.  
Clothes embroidered colorfully.  
Belts have sharp swords.  
Bored of drink and food.  
Wealth and commodities are excessive.  
This is called 'stealing.' Exaggeration!  
Not a guide!

#### 54. Culturing Perspectives

Worthy builders do not tear down.  
Worthy embracers do not let go.  
Sons and grandsons never stop sacrificing.  
Culture it in one self  
and its virtuosity is authenticity.  
Culture it in a family  
and its virtuosity is sufficiency.  
Culture it in a village  
and its virtuosity is elders.  
Culture it in a state  
and its virtuosity is wealth.  
Culture it in the social world  
and its virtuosity is universality.  
Hence use 'self' to view the self.  
'Family' to view the family.  
'Village' to view the village.  
'State' to view the state.  
'Social world' to view the social world.  
How do I know the social world's condition?  
With this.

#### 55. Abstruse Signs

The thickness of implicit virtuosity:  
Compare it to a robust infant.  
Bees, scorpions, serpents, and snakes do not sting.  
Ferocious animals do not seize.  
Birds of prey do not take.  
Bones are weak and muscles soft and yet he has a firm grasp.  
He does not yet know to join male and female and yet he is completely ready.  
This is the instinct's having arrived.  
The whole day he babbles and he does not get hoarse.  
The balance having arrived.  
Knowing how to balance, call it 'constant'  
Knowing how to stay constant, call it 'discernment.'

Benefiting life, call it 'auspicious.'  
The heart-mind's deploying life-force, call it 'coercion.'  
When natural kinds are mature then old age sets in.  
Call this not guided.  
That which is not guided is early already.

#### 56. Abstruse Virtuosity

Those who know to act do not speak.  
Those who speak, do not know to act.  
Shut up its exchanges,  
close its gates.  
Dull its sharpness,  
undo its divisions.  
Balance its brightness,  
treat its particles as identical.  
This is called the abstruse identity.  
Hence we cannot obtain and be close.  
Cannot obtain and be distant.  
Cannot obtain and benefit.  
Cannot obtain and harm.  
Cannot obtain and value.  
Cannot obtain and debase.  
Hence we deem the social world as valuable.

#### 57. Laissez Faire Politics

Use correcting to order the state.  
Use shock in deploying military force.  
Use absence of social matters to take charge of the social world.  
How do I know these are so?  
With this.  
The more the social world has to elude,  
the more the people are impoverished.  
The more the people have beneficial artifacts,  
the more the state and society are befuddled.  
The more humans are skilled and clever  
the more strange natural kinds crop up.  
The more standards of behavior and commands are promulgated,  
the more thieves and robbers there are.  
Hence sages say:  
I lack deeming-action and the people self-transform.  
I remain calm and the people self-correct.  
I avoid social matters and the people self-enrich.  
I lack desires and the people self-simplify (become like uncarved wood).

58. Social Reversal  
It is torpid  
its people are guileless.

Its government is critically discriminating  
its people are deficient.  
Calamity! The ground of fortuity.  
Fortuity! The obverse of calamity.  
Who knows its pivot?  
It lacks a 'correct'  
The 'correct' returns to be deemed unorthodox.  
Worthiness returns to be deemed an apparition.  
Human superstition  
a truly old story.  
Using this: Sages  
square things without carving  
Are fair without punishing.  
Are straight without being arbitrary.  
Are bright without dazzling us.

#### 59. A Sensible Guide

In governing people and serving nature, nothing is better than conserving.  
In general, only conserving  
deserves to be called early readiness.  
Early readiness: call it emphasizing accumulating virtuosity.  
If one emphasizes accumulating virtuosity then there is nothing one cannot conquer.  
If there is nothing one cannot conquer, no one knows one's limit.  
Those of whom no one knows their limits  
may take states.  
The mother of taking states  
is able to endure.  
This is called the deep root and inherent base  
Of the guide to long-life and enduring vision.

#### 60. Skill at Ruling

Ruling a large state  
Is like grilling a small bit of fresh food.  
Using a guide to manage the social world  
Its ghost does not energize.  
If it is not that its ghost does not energize,  
Its energy does not harm humans.  
If it is not that its energy does not harm humanity,  
Sages also do not harm humans.  
In general, when both of these do not mutually harm,  
Then virtuosity exchanges and returns in it.

#### 61. Virtuosity at Using 'Beneath'

Those which are great states flow downward.  
The male exchanges in the social world!  
The female is the base of the social world!  
The female constants using stillness. She conquers the male

using stillness to act out 'beneath'.  
Hence if great states use 'beneath' on small states,  
then they take small states.  
If small states use 'beneath' on great states,  
then they take great states.  
Hence some 'beneath' in order to take,  
some 'beneath' and then take.  
Great states simply desire universally domesticating people.  
Small states simply desire serving people.  
So of the two, each gets what it wants.  
The great fittingly deems 'beneath'.

## 62. Construing a Guide

A guide is a mystery among the ten-thousand natural kinds.  
A treasure to worthy people.  
That which non-worthy people sustain.  
Beautiful language can be marketed.  
Respectful behavior can augment humanness.  
Those who are not worthy, what abandonment is there?  
Hence, set up the master of nature and establish the three dukes.  
Although one presents jade followed by a team of horses  
It is not as good as sitting and promoting this guide.  
That which ancient times treated as valuable was guidance.  
How can we not say "with seeking you get to have it, with wrongdoing avoid  
unorthodoxy."  
Hence construe the social world's value.

## 63. Origins in Reversal

Treat lacking deem-action as 'deem-acting'.  
Treat having no social affair as 'social affair'.  
Treat the absence of flavor as 'flavor'.  
'Great' the small; 'many' the few;  
Use virtuosity in dealing with moral anger.  
Plan the difficult in its easy phases.  
Deem-act on the great in its small phases.  
The difficult affairs of the social world start with something easy.  
The great affairs of the social world start with something small.  
Using this: Sages, to the end, do not deem-act on it as 'great' and so are able to  
accomplish its greatness.  
In general, light assent necessarily diminishes trust.  
Much ease then necessarily much difficulty.  
Using this: Sages make it even more difficult.  
So in the end they have no difficulty.

64. Dealing with the Small.  
It is easy to sustain a situation when it is pacified.  
It is easy to plan when it doesn't yet show signs of danger.

It is easy to dissolve what is crisp; easy to disperse what is minute.  
Deem-act on it in its not-yet-exist phase; order it in its not-yet-disordered phase.  
An armful of wood arises from small sprouts; nine story towers start from a pile of earth.  
A thousand league walk starts with putting the foot down.  
Those who deem-act wreck it; those who grasp lose it.  
Using this: Sages lack deeming action, hence they lack wrecking, lack grasping hence lack losing.  
The people in pursuing social affairs take the phase of nearly completed as constant and then wreck it.  
If you are as careful at the end as in the beginning then you will lack wrecking things.  
Using this: Sages treat not-desiring as a desire and don't value goods difficult to obtain.  
Study not-studying and restore what the crowd of humanity has passed by.  
Use restoring the self-so nature of the ten-thousand natural kinds and don't recklessly deem-act.

#### 65. Unlearned Virtuosity

Those in ancient times who were good at deem-acting on a guide  
Did not to use it to make the people discerning but to make them stupid.  
People's being hard to govern comes from their knowing how to do too much.  
Hence to use know-how to govern a state is the thief of the state.  
Not to use know-how to govern a state is the blessing of the state.  
Those who know to do these two things are also evaluated models.  
To treat knowing to follow evaluated models as constant,  
This is called obscure virtuosity.  
Obscure virtuosity becomes deep! Becomes distant!  
Becomes the reversal of natural kinds.  
After it is so, then it achieves great flow.

#### 66. Strategic Reversal

The reason rivers and oceans can deem-act as kings of a hundred valleys:  
Is that they are good-at lowering them.  
Hence they are able to deem-act as king of a hundred valleys.  
Using this: if you desire to elevate the people, you must use language to diminish them.  
If you desire to place the people first, you must treat them as less than your body.  
Using this: Sages occupy the upper position and the people are not important.  
Occupy the prior position and the people are not harmed.  
Using this: the social world happily promotes and does not resent.  
It's because he does not dispute.  
So in the social world, nothing disputes with him.

#### 67. Three Treasures

Everyone in the social world calls my guide 'great'  
It's like not resembling.  
In general only being great hence like not resembling.  
If I resembled, it would long since have been small!  
I have three treasures. I grasp and preserve them.  
The first is called 'charity' the second 'frugality' and the third not presuming to deem-act

coming before the social world.  
Charity, hence one can be brave.  
Frugal, hence one can be magnanimous.  
Not presuming to deem-act coming before the social world, hence one can to fulfill the artifactual role of an elder.  
Moderns abandon charity and are still brave.  
Abandon frugality and are still liberal.  
Abandon following and still put themselves in front.  
Dead already!  
Using charity in battle, one is victorious.  
If involved in preserving then inherent nature will save it. Use charity to defend it.

#### 68. Coinciding with Nature

Those who are good champions don't battle.  
Those who are good at war don't get angry.  
Those who are good at defeating the enemy don't engage them.  
Those who are good at using people deem it as something beneath them.  
This is called virtuosity at not contending.  
This is called the power of using people.  
This is called on a par with nature--the apex of antiquity.

#### 69. Profound Use

There are slogans for using armies.  
"I don't presume to deem-act as lord and deem-act as guest.  
Don't presume to advance an inch and withdraw a foot."  
This is called "carrying out not carrying out.  
Bearing non-existent arms;  
Throwing against non-existent enemies.  
Controlling non-existing armies."  
No disaster is greater than taking an enemy lightly.  
Taking an enemy lightly almost brings my treasures to grief.  
Inherently, opposing armies strengthen each other.  
Grieving then wins.

#### 70. Difficulty in Knowing How

My words are profoundly easy to know.  
Profoundly easy to perform.  
In the social world none are able to know or to perform.  
Language has an ancestor and social affairs have a ruler.  
In general only lacking know-how--this counts as my know-how.  
If those who know me are rare then things of mine are valuable.  
Using this: Sages wrap precious jade in burlap.

7:            n-how as a disease  
Kl           j not to know is better.  
Not knowing to know is a defect.



In general, in only 'defecting' defects, using this is not to 'defect.'  
Sages do not 'defect' because they 'defect' defects.  
For this reason they do not 'defect.'

## 72. Self-love

If the people do not fear authority then great authority has arrived.  
Don't toy around with things they are at home with.  
Don't despise things that contribute to their livelihood.  
In general, only if you don't despise [them], using this [they] will not despise [you].  
Using this: Sages start from what they know to do not from what they see.  
Start from love not from value.  
So they choose this and reject that.

## 73. Employing Deeming

If one is courageously presumptuous, then--killing.  
If one is courageously non-presumptuous, then--living.  
These pairings : one benefits, one harms.  
That which nature despises, who knows its cause?  
Using this, sages make it even more difficult.  
The natural guide does not contend and yet is good at winning.  
Does not discourse and yet skillfully responds.  
Does not call and yet comes of itself.  
Insensate and yet good at planning.  
The natural net is all encompassing.  
It is loose and yet nothing is lost.

## 74. Controlling Feelings

When the people are not afraid off death  
For what reason would you use death to frighten them?  
If you cause the people to constant fear of death  
And yet those who deem: act deviantly, we take, hold and kill them,  
who will dare do it?  
Should we constant having a professional executor do the killing?  
To delegate a professional executor for killing,  
Is this called "delegating the great carpenter to chop"?  
Those who delegate the great carpenter to chop are few.  
It doesn't hurt his hand.

## 75. The Destructiveness of Envy

Starvation among the people comes from how much taxes-in-kind those above them 'eat'.  
From this: they starve.  
The difficulty in governing people comes from those above them taking deeming-action.  
From this: they are difficult to govern.  
People take death lightly because those above them seek life's richness.  
Fi is they take death lightly.  
Ir al: only those who don't deem-act using 'life' --these are worthies at valuing life.

## **76. Strength's Warning Signs.**

**The human living state is soft and pliable.**

**The dead state is hard and rigid.**

**The alive state of the ten-thousand natural kinds --grass and wood--is soft and crisp.**

**Their dead state is hard and dry.**

**So things that are hard and rigid accompany death.**

**Things that are soft and pliable accompany life.**

**So if troops are strong they do not triumph.**

**When wood is stiff, it makes weapons.**

**When strength is great, its place is down.**

**When soft and pliable, its place is up.**

## **77. The Natural Guide**

**The guide of nature: Is it not like a taut bow?**

**That which is high, represses them.**

**That which is low, raise them up.**

**That which has abundance, pare it back.**

**That which is insufficient, add to it.**

**The guide of nature is to pare back abundance and add to the insufficient.**

**If it's the guide of humans then it's not like that.**

**It injures that which is not sufficient and piles it on that which has abundance.**

**Who can have abundance and use it to pile it on the social world?**

**Only one who has a guide.**

**Using this: Sages Deem-act and don't rely on anything.**

**His work is accomplished and he doesn't locate it.**

**This is his not desiring the apprehending of worthies.**

## **78. Recognizing Fidelity**

**In the social world, nothing is softer or more pliant than water.**

**And yet when it attacks firm, rigid things, none of them is able to win.**

**This is due to their lacking that with which to metamorphose it.**

**That the pliant wins over the rigid, the soft wins over the hard,**

**In the social world, no one fails to know.**

**[Yet] no one is able to execute.**

**Using this: Sages say, "Taking the soil of a state, this is called ruler of the world's grain alters.**

**Taking the non-auspicious state, this is being deemed the king of the social world."**

**Rectified language is like its opposite.**

## **79. Recognizing Agreements**

**Settling a massive resentment**

**Necessarily some resentment will be left-over.**

**How can such be deemed as worth?**

**U: is: Sages grasp the left side of the agreement.**

**Al: 't demand from others.**

**Have virtuosity in supervising agreements.**

**Lack virtuosity in supervising taxation.  
The natural guide has no kin.  
It constants being with worthy people.**

#### **80. Primitivist Independence**

**'Small' the state and 'few' the people.  
Bring about that having artifacts by the tens and hundreds yet they won't use them.  
Bring it about that the people "weight" death and don't venture far.  
Although they have boats and chariots, they don't have reasons to ride in them.  
Although they have armour and weapons, they don't have reasons to marshall them.  
Bring it about that humans revert to knotting string and use that.  
"Sweet' their food; "beautiful' their clothing.  
'Peaceful' their neighborhoods; 'pleasant' their customs.  
Nearby states can see each other.  
And hear the sounds of each other's chickens and dogs.  
The peoples reach old age and death without any interaction.**

#### **81. Making the Essence Clear**

**Accurate language is not beautiful.  
Beautiful language is not accurate.  
Those who are good at [things] don't distinguish.  
Those who distinguish are not good at [things].  
Those who know-how are not comprehensive.  
Those who are comprehensive do not know how.  
Sages don't accumulate.  
Although they use it to deem-act "others"  
Themselves increase 'having'  
Although they use it to give others.  
Themselves increase in magnitude.  
The guide of nature: benefit and yet do not harm.  
The guide of Sages: deem-act and don't dispute.**

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Chad Hansen  
Laozi (Lao Tzu)  
<http://www.hku.hk/philodep/ch/laoency.htm>

Laozi (Lao Tzu: dates uncertain. Speculation ranges from from 600 BC to 200 BC) is, we assume, the author of the Daode Jing (Tao Te Ching), the most beloved and widely translated Chinese philosophical text. The figure of Laozi has always been shrouded in mystery. It deepens the more we discover about the texts. Tradition regarded Laozi as Confucius' (6th Century BC) teacher and the "founder" of Daoism, the "doubt tradition" movement in modern China gave influential arguments for dating the text to the middle "Warring States" period (4th Century BC). The discovery of 1st Century BC version of the text suggested the text was in flux over a long period of time. A. C. Graham argued that the text probably became important only after Zhuangzi died (ca. 295 BC). Scholars in China the contrary, have reverted to the traditional dating placing Laozi before Confucius. Many

scholars dismiss Laozi as mythological or use his name as shorthand for "the author(s) of the Daode Jing."

The interpretation of the text is complicated by its disputed history and, thus, is even more controversial. There are now over 100 different translations and closer to 2000 commentaries in Chinese. Traditional views are that Laozi inspired Zhuangzi and they together formed a philosophical school known as "Daoism" which inspired a later religion of the same name. Until recently, scholars mostly thought the religion was a distortion of the philosophy, but some now argue that the text emerged first from a religion worshipping the Yellow Emperor along with Laozi (known as Huang-Lao).

We obviously cannot consider all the interpretations here and our interest is more philosophical than religious. We can justify our focus whichever historical story we tell since, as Graham's analysis stressed, the Zhuangzi introduces Laozi into Chinese philosophical discourse. Whatever its dates and origin, Laozi first meant to Chinese philosophy what the school of Zhuangzi first found of interest in it. We will look for the philosophical theory that would best justify Zhuangzi's interest and explain the traditional genealogy. We leave open whether the religious reading came later than the philosophical or preceded it.

We should note that religious interpretations dominate the extant translations. They reverse our strategy here and make the interpretation of Zhuangzi conform to the theory that he was a religious disciple. According to this interpretation, Laozi and later Zhuangzi had some mystical experience—an experience of the indescribable oneness of everything. They changed the meaning of "dao" (tao) from "guiding instructions" and used it to refer to a divine being (on the model of Buddha or mystical creator-God).

Besides the empirically dubious claims about the mystical experiences and the meaning change, the religious interpretation of the text faces serious difficulties. (1) The mystical reading, "there is a dao which language cannot describe," describes that very dao and is incoherent on its face. Elaborating further on that dao, as religious readings take the texts to do, is hard to motivate. (2) If we take seriously the claim that language cannot talk about dao, it must rely on a theory of what language can do as much as it does on the concept of the object. We can study that philosophy of language with no threat of incoherence (especially since ordinarily dao refers to a linguistic object-prescriptive discourse). If we can explain the content and character of Laozi's text using its linguistic theory alone, it will undermine any remaining motivation to postulate the mystical experience and accuse Daoists of changing the meaning of their key term in their critique of Confucianism.

Let us start, then, with the historical account in The Zhuangzi. It names Shen Dao as a forerunner of Laozi. Shen Dao's slogan was "abandon knowledge; discard self." 'Knowledge' meant knowledge of some moral dao. He used the notion of a 'Great dao' to refer to the actual course of world history. You will follow it; you need no knowledge of daoguides to follow the Great Dao. "Even a clod of earth, can not miss the dao," he concluded.

The Zhuangzi account distances both Laozi and Zhuangzi from Shen Dao. The narrator says "[Shen Dao's] is a daoguide that can not daoguide" and characterizes it as a daoguide for the dead, not for the living. The point is that "what will be will be" has no implications for action. Whatever we do will accord with Great Dao, but knowing that does not help me decide what to do. Zhuangzi implicitly disclosed a deeper paradox in Shen Dao's views. Since it is telling us to do something, Shen Dao's slogan itself a bit of guiding knowledge. So, if we follow it, we disobey it. If we follow Shen Dao's

prescription, we do what prescription itself says not to do. Laozi, however, not only tolerated this paradox, he replicated it.

We can understand Laozi, then, as accepting the paradoxical "abandon knowledge" spirit of Shen Dao, but rejecting the fatalism. Something like the Great Dao does surfaces sporadically in the Laozi, but it is not the focus of his theory. He may have tolerated the paradox on the grounds stated in his first line. "No daoguide that can daoguide is a constant daoguide." Shen Dao's is a constant dao (i.e., natural or not dependent on changeable convention) but it can not guide. Any daoguide that can is changeable.

That famous opening line is followed by a less noticed parallel-"Any name that can name is not a constant name." This signals that dao denotes linguistic items-systems of guiding discourse. Laozi is skeptical of the reliability of a discourse dao. The skepticism rests on the conventional (hence changeable) nature of language. No discourse-based instruction will guide reliably in all circumstances because the terms used do not mark distinctions reliably. The contrast of the natural and the conventional pervades the text.

How does this line of thought lead to the "abandon knowledge" conclusion? What motivates it is the goal of freedom from social control. Laozi treats (prescriptive) knowledge as based on language. Accordingly, knowledge consists of arbitrary, historically "accidental" social systems of making distinctions, guiding desires and acting. Laozi then justifies "abandon knowledge" as a way to recover our natural, authentic, spontaneous human impulses.

Chinese language theories call all characters mingnames. Adjectives and common nouns alike have a scope-they "pick out" a range of reality and exclude the rest. Words are 'names' of their "range of stuff." Learning a name for X means learning how to make a distinction between X and non-X. We cannot claim mastery of the word 'cat' if we call spiders "cat". We thus learn X and feint X together as a single socially shared way to make a distinction. Laozi implies that in learning to apply the distinction and classify things in one way rather than another, we are being socialized into an inherited social design.

Much of this approach to language is common in ancient China. What Laozi adds is that society shapes our desires via words and distinctions. We will not count as having mastered the distinction between beautiful and ugly if we prefer the ugly. Acquiring a "sophisticated" taste molds our desires and shapes our choices and action.

Artificial desires increase strife, first because social structures expand the number of desires and second because the acquired desires are more competitive than natural ones. We would not naturally desire things, for example, simply because they are rare. Socially instilled desires motivate a thirst for status and power. Our natural desires are few and simple.

Finally, the desires lead to *wei*action -a term at the center of Laozi's famous *wuwei* (non-action) slogan. We teach that the word *wei* has two meanings-'to act' and 'for the sake of'. Hence, the standard elaboration of Laozi's slogan is that we should not act deliberately or purposefully. We could motivate this conclusion using Buddhist or Western psychology (i.e., desires get in the way of reason), but it is hard to explain why Laozi would recommend being careless or random in action. He has no concept of reason and treats some desires (e.g. for sex, food, leisure, etc.) as acceptable.

Weido:deem has another meaning that explains the slogan better in a Chinese context. Wei is used in the Chinese approximation of belief contexts ("X believes that T is P"). Classical Chinese splits the embedded belief sentence. The (optional) subject (T) comes before the weido:deem and the predicate (P) after. The complete form is: "X with regard to T, weido:deem [it to be] P."

If we understand weido:deem as treating things according to what we deem them to be, we get an insight into Laozi's slogan. It is a corollary of the view that we are to avoid socially instilled distinctions and desires. So ultimately, we should also avoid action based on our training in linguistic distinctions. The objection is to socialization, not rational purpose or deliberation. Laozi indicates that he senses a paradox in wulack weideem:act. He also says "lack" weido:deem and yet lack not-weido:deem. The problem is that we have just learned a guiding concept complete with a distinction, a desire, and a proposed course of action. If we are to avoid wei we must also avoid avoiding wei.

Laozi's slogan replicates Shen Dao's "abandon knowledge" paradox (i.e., "abandon knowledge" is itself a bit of [prescriptive] knowledge). The knowledge in question is still "social guidance," now analyzed as action guided by desires engendered by social distinctions and names. Laozi's motivation is naturalness, spontaneity or freedom from social conventions rather than in fatalism, but the paradox is in the conclusion, not the motivation. The paradox in wulack weido:deem follows a bigger and more interesting circle.

The analysis starts with the concepts of natural/conventional, which it treats as a pivotal distinction. Laozi teaches us a potentially controversial way to draw the distinction (i.e., anything based on 'language' is conventional). It implicitly encourages a preference or desire for being natural and, finally, based on the names, distinctions and desires, it recommends an action. Laozi says, "in pursuit of dao we daily forget." This forgetting is the weideem:act of getting rid of weideem:act. As long as we do it, we fail to do it. In urging wu-wei we have identified an action and in striving to avoid it, we are doing what it tells us not to.

Zhuangzi abandoned the paradoxical wu-wei position, but accepted the analysis showing how distinctions and desires are "socially constructed." Laozi's paradox vaguely reminds us of the Buddhist paradox of desire (you must desire to rid yourself of desires). However, Buddhist theory indicts especially the natural desires. We more plausibly interpret Laozi's stance as allowing "pre-social" desires. His position tends toward that of the Confucian nativists, e.g., Mencius. If we can "forget" the learned desires arising from language socialization, we will return to nature.

The "new born" child does have desires (e.g., for sex, food, and comfort etc.). These and their "purely natural" successors are the desires that underwrite Laozi's "primitive utopia." A suitably reduced system of desires would sustain social life at the simple agrarian village level but would not generate the "unnatural" ambition to travel and expand one's horizons of knowledge.

The social analysis of knowledge (i.e., discourse guidance) is thus accompanied a conception of innate or natural knowledge (pre-linguistic instinct). This partly gives the text its notorious ambiguity and contradictory character. One finds passages in which knowledge, clarity, and sages are ridiculed and their "accomplishments" pictured as viciously relative. Then other passages speak positively of knowledge, clarity, and sages.

One philosophical way of reading Laozi can both ameliorates the paradox and the inconsistency. It assigns a coherent role to interesting stylistic and content features of Laozi's philosophical poem. We treat the bulk of the text (the political and metaphysical passages) as a heuristic and separate three systems of knowledge. The first system of knowledge consists of conventional guidance or

wisdom. Conventional knowledge includes the familiar moral precepts of Confucians (traditionalists) and the systematic utilitarianism of the Mohists (moral reformers). Moralists propose schemes of guidance designed in the hope that everyone in society will learn and follow them. As Laozi noted, these moral systems are based on learning distinctions and using them in choosing actions.

Laozi challenges the assumptions behind this "positive" view partly by exhibiting a system we can call the negative Dao. We get this dao by reversing all conventional moral assumptions. Laozi's strategy shows that for key guiding terms, we can choose exactly the opposite of conventional wisdom. He draws the sayings in this "negative dao" from poems, slogans, couplets and aphorisms collected from many sources (and as our textual theory suggests, over a long period of editing). The sources include military stratagems, political cynicism, and Shen Dao's monism. We may even count Daoist primitivism itself as a heuristic example of anti-conventional advice.

This negative dao is Laozi's famous "dao of reversal." Where Confucian or conventional morality normally values renbenevolence, Laozi notes that tiannature:heaven is not benevolent. We normally value activity, dominance, the upper position, strength and upstanding rigidity. Laozi urges us to see the value of passivity, weakness, the lower position, and receptive yielding. Laozi values dullness over brilliance, ignorance over knowledge, lacking over having, etc.

These reversals link up easily with the emerging yin-yang, sexual reproduction cosmology. Laozi emphasizes the importance of the female and "draws sustenance from the mother." He treats the female as the "valley of the world." Further, yin-yang also metaphorically explains the importance of water with its connection to moisture, the lower position, passivity and overcoming through yielding.

On the metaphysical side, where we normally value youhaving:being. Laozi points to the utility of wulacking:non-being. He stresses the usefulness of the emptiness in a cup, a room and, famously, the hub of a wheel. The knowledge we gain from these "reversals" of ordinary value may be called "negative knowledge." It consists in seeing that the conventional ways of using terms to guide us can be reversed. They are not constant.

However, we cannot coherently take Laozi to allege that his negative dao is a constant dao. Confucians criticize the "scheming methods" and the disingenuous tone of some of the "negative" advice. Laozi, they charge, urges us to act submissive in order to dominate. He talks of keeping people ignorant, so they can be ruled more easily.

The criticism implies that Laozi surreptitiously clings to the conventional values, e.g., he really aims at domination. We can excuse his doing so if he is trying to make the negative dao seem plausible from our present lights. However, there is a deeper objection. Although he reverses the values, he relies on precisely the same conventional terms and distinctions. Is he still committed to a "constant" dao based on "constant" names?

The strategy is to say that the negative dao is a heuristic. It's point is to get us to see something else. Thus it defends Laozi against these charges. The moral of the reversal is not simply to replace one normative scheme with another. It calls in question the whole idea of having a scheme in the first place, hence of any replacement scheme. Laozi's position might be that the practical "content" of those conventional distinctions lies in the evaluative attitude that accompanies them. The conventional assumption is that they guide us correctly. Hence, if they can be reversed, then the sc of names is not a "reliable" way to carve things up.



This conclusion is somewhat implausible. Names and distinctions that reflect real joints and fissures of the world can obviously guide us in different ways in different circumstances. Water is good when we are thirsty and bad when we are drowning. We can help Laozi's case a little if we assume understood Mohism well enough to be appealing to its pragmatic analysis of naming. If the justification of a distinction is only pragmatic success, and if we can show that equal success follows from reversing conventional guidance, this will either calls into question either the distinctions themselves or the strings of guiding discourse using them.

Now, to what guiding system does the heuristic point? What could the third level of knowledge be? Laozi formulates no answer. Part of the genius and appeal of Laozi's philosophical poem is to leave that up to the reader. We can say that it should not simply be an alternative, posited dao. It is more likely that Laozi intended to challenge us to make a "philosophical ascent" to higher level of ethical reflection-to "thinking about thinking." The most plausible point of the Daode Jing's analysis would be metaethical. It leads us to reflect on the process of proposing rival daos for the purpose of guidance.

Its thrust seems to be relativist or skeptical. To say that there is no constant dao is to say that any dao will be rest on some scheme of background distinctions and attitudes. All standards consist of distinctions and attitudes which are themselves subject to revision on subsequent reflection. We may decide that Laozi's point is either that there is no way or there are many ways of asking and answering ultimate normative questions.

We can also see a philosophical role for the religious or mystical reading that dominates translations. The skeptical point of Laozi's analysis of action-guiding distinctions is that there really are none. A mystical answer is practically indistinguishable from the skeptical one. "There is no ultimate criterion of rightness" and "there is an ultimate criterion that says nothing" will be functionally equivalent. Laozi's skeptical overtones emerge in his occasional celebration of "ignorance" or "dullness." There is wisdom in knowing your not knowing and knowing when to stop.

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