

The Way of the Ultimate Tao

Chris King*

ABSTRACT

From the beginning both mind and universe exist as paradoxical complements, each discovering its own nature through its complement. That is, the foundation of the mind and of the universe is the Tao. The universe is forever the Tao of Physics, as Capra noted, the paradoxical interplay of wave and particle, and as natural processes gather into the macroscopic world of experience, chaos and order, as the weather, evolution and conscious thought alike attest. For order to attempt to rule over chaos is as futile as for the particle to try to rule over the wave. Any society which attempts to rule by order alone is doomed to catastrophe as the natural process transition becomes frozen into an apocalyptic revolution collapsing the old order.

Key Words: Tao, mind, universe, complementarity, DeCarte, duality, reality, nature.

*There was something complete and mysterious
Existing before heaven and earth,
Silent, invisible,
Unchanging, standing alone,
Unceasing, ever in motion.
Able to be the mother of the world.
I do not know its name.
Call it Tao. Lao Tsu.*

Complementarity: The Tao of Physics, Nature and Gender

The foundation of the mind and of the universe is the Tao. It is forever a complementation, not a Decartesian duality, across which there is an indivisible gulf, but the intimate marriage of realities - It is the hieros gamos of nature itself. From the beginning both mind and universe exist as paradoxical complements, each discovering its own nature through its complement. From birth to death, all our experience of reality is through the magic warp and weft of the subjective conscious mind. It is the umbilicus of reality without which the physical universe would be an abyss without even a dream of existence.

Yet the physical universe is also fundamental to existence, for through it our manifold dreams of existence find one common ground of objectivity in which the entire historical process of incarnation can come to a meaningful account. We are physical. We bleed when cut and swoon when concussed.

* Correspondence: Chris King <http://www.dhushara.com> E-Mail: chris@sexualparadox.org

Yet the description of physical reality is no more and no less than a myth told about the stabilities and correspondences of our conscious experience.

The phenomena of the physical universe are themselves in a state of a paradox of relativity and quantum uncertainty in which the future and the past become lost in probabilities which can never be disentangled from their quantum superpositions until the reaper of experience casts our lot and the world becomes frozen into the history we see being made before our eyes.

For the universe is forever the Tao of Physics, as Capra (R83) noted - the paradoxical interplay of wave and particle, and as natural processes gather into the macroscopic world of experience, chaos and order, as the weather, evolution and conscious thought alike attest. For order to attempt to rule over chaos is as futile as for the particle to try to rule over the wave. Any society which attempts to rule by order alone is doomed to catastrophe as the natural process transition becomes frozen into an apocalyptic revolution collapsing the old order.

'The prophecies sometimes set your mind off in new directions'
Lee & Yang before making their Nobel prize-winning discovery of non-conservation of parity

In regard to nature, the imposition of order, by domination of nature, through belief that the rule of order of civilization can continue until the evidence to the contrary is incontestable is suicidal. By this time many chaotic transitions have reached irreversible crisis and we become doomed by our own rigid lack of sensitivity and foresight. This is the why we need inebriety of foresight, and the samadhi of contemplation as well as the rational scientific approach when dealing with the uncarved block of future possibilities.

The natural order requires complementation between the harmonious rule of order and a continuing respect for the fertility of chaos. Order needs to be at all times suppliant and responsive to fertile transition so that new order can emerge from the natural ferment of chaos.

The Tao is the path of nature. It is not only living with nature but being nature as individuals and in the societies we foster and the cultures we celebrate. The way of nature is also the way of life and death, of tooth and claw, but it is the role of immortal wisdom to understand nature in all her complements and to utilize her bounty in arriving at a just and harmonious existence, without imposing on her our own selfish designs. In doing so we are 'future dreaming' engaging in a vision quest of the evolutionary unfolding. The Tao stresses moving with the forces of nature in utilizing their own flow sustainably, not in dominion and domination.

The Way of the Valley

In the "Tao te Ching" (R165, R594), Lao Tsu, or 'old man' provides a clear and organic example of Taoist subtlety in erasing personal history. The work was written only through a twist of fate, because as Lao Tsu was leaving for the wilderness for the last time, he was jailed by the gatekeeper until he wrote down his teachings for posterity. This 'gatekeeper' is himself said to be a great master Yin-hsi of the Kuan (i.e. Han-ku) Pass (Wilhelm 1931 6). It is said that when Lao Tsu walked, the birds and animals

would accompany him. Lao Tsu and Confucius were contemporaries and it is said that Confucius met Lao Tsu to take advice from the 'man of the wilderness', whom he found an unnerving foil to his own ideas of social order.



"The dark has a light spot and the light has a dark spot - that's how they can relate to one another" Complementation of male and female nature yin and yang in one another in the Tao (Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth - TV).

"In the Taoist perspective, even good and evil are not head-on opposites. The West has tended to dichotomize the two, but Taoists are less categorical. They buttress their reserve with the story of a farmer whose horse ran away. His neighbor commiserated, only to be told, "Who knows what's good or bad?" It was true, for the next day the horse returned, bringing with it a drove of wild horses it had befriended. The neighbor reappeared, this time with congratulations for the windfall. He received the same response: "Who knows what's good or bad?" Again this proved true, for the next day the farmer's son tried to mount one of the wild horses and fell, breaking his leg. More commiserations from the neighbor, which elicited the question, "Who knows what is good or bad?" And for a fourth time the farmer's point prevailed, for the following day soldiers came by commandeering for the army, and the son was exempted because of his injury." Huston Smith, *The World's Religions* (Ochigrosso R398 153)

The Chinese Tao, natural law, or way provides a cleavage of the totality into complementary creative and receptive principles. The Tao is a seamless web of unbroken movement and change filled with undulations, waves, patterns of ripples, vortices and temporary standing waves like a river. Every observer is an integral functioning part of this web which extends both into the past and into the future throughout space-time. It never stops, never turns back on itself, and none of its patterns of which we can take conceptual snapshots are real in the sense of being permanent, even for the briefest moment of time we can imagine. Like streaming clouds the objects and facts of our world are to the Taoist simply shapes and phases which last long enough in one general form for us to consider them as units. In a strong wind clouds change their shapes fast. In the slowest of the winds of Tao the mountains and rocks of the earth change their shapes very slowly - but continuously and certainly.

No binary, ideal or atomic concept has any independent reality or permanence in this unchanging river of change. No symbol can be separated from the organic context of the whole. Nothing which happens, no event or process ever repeats itself exactly. Nevertheless the Tao is unchanging like a convoluted

eroded stone which stands beyond time. Men simply find it hard to observe the fact. All the separations which men claim to decipher in the web of Tao are useful fabrications, concepts being themselves ripples in the 'mental' part of the stream. Each human being himself is woven out of a complex system of totally mobile interactions with his environment. His body is in perpetual change, not by jumps from state to state; for his aging does not correspond to minutes, hours and birthdays, but goes on all the time.

The twisted and eroded stone was a motif repeated tens of thousands of times in paintings and on ceramics, often combined with trees, flowers and birds. Its reference always is to this truth of Tao as a reality whose essence is never ceasing, perpetual, seamless process. In the face of this intuition, what can man do?

There is a relevant story told in the *Chuang-tzu*, one of the most revered Taoist books. One day Confucius and his pupils were walking by a turbulent river, which swept over rocks, rapids and waterfalls. They saw an old man swimming in the river, far upstream. He was playing in the raging water and went under. Confucius sent his pupils running downstream to try and save him. However, the old man beached safely on the bank, and stood up unharmed, the water streaming from his hair. The pupils brought him to Confucius, who asked him how on earth he had managed to survive in the torrent among the rocks. He answered, 'Oh, I know how to go in with a descending vortex, and come out with an ascending one' (Rawson and Legeza R440).

In the *Chuang Tzu* Lao Tzu asks Confucius "What is the gist of your teaching?" "The gist of it is benevolence and righteousness." "May I ask if they belong to the inborn nature of man?" asked Lao Tzu. "Of course," said Confucius. "If the gentleman lacks benevolence, he will get nowhere; if he lacks righteousness, he cannot even stay alive. They are truly the inborn nature of man. What else could they be?" Lao Tzu said, "May I ask your definition of benevolence and righteousness?" Confucius said, "To be glad and joyful in mind; to embrace universal love and be without partisanship - this is the true form of benevolence and righteousness." Lao Tzu said, "'Universal love' - that's a rather nebulous ideal, isn't it? And to be without partisanship is already a kind of partisanship. Do you want to keep the world from losing its simplicity? Heaven and earth hold fast to their constant ways, the sun and moon to their brightness, the stars and planets to their ranks, the birds and beasts to their flocks, the trees and shrubs to their stands. You have only to go along with Virtue in your actions, to follow the Way in your journey, and already you will be there. Why these flags of benevolence and righteousness, so bravely upraised, as though you were beating a drum and searching for a lost child? Ah, you will bring confusion to the nature of man."

The Tao, that web of time and change, is a network of vortices like a moving and dangerous torrent of water; and the ideal Taoist is he who has learned to use all his senses and faculties to intuit the shapes of the currents in the Tao, so as to harmonize himself with them completely. Works of art provide some of the means for bringing people into communion with the currents and vortices, giving them a deep sense of their presence, and of the ways in which the tangled skeins evolve.



The Jade Lady among the clouds - Yin as Chaos

Ts'ui Tzu-chung (Rawson and Legeza R440). One of the most important and complex female deities of Taoism is the Queen Mother of the West, who can confer immortality.

*'Vast indeed is the ultimate Tao,
Spontaneously itself, apparently without acting,
End of all ages and beginning of all ages,
Existing before Earth and existing before Heaven,
Silently embracing the whole of time,
Continuing uninterrupted though all eons, ...
It is the ancestor of all doctrines,
The mystery beyond all mysteries' (Tao te Ching).*

It is only in this sense of unbroken wholeness that the Tao is subdivided into natural complementary creative and receptive principles of yang and yin associated with male and female, day and night, heaven and earth etc. The power of the creative lies beyond the describable, and complements the world of form. The two together form the mysterious totality of existence. Central to the organic nature of the Tao is the inextricable dependence of each attribute on its complement, from which it draws its very identity.

*Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty
only because there is ugliness.
All can know good as good
only because there is evil.*

The Tao cannot be named, cannot be symbolized nor captured by rational thought or symbols:

*The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth.
The named is the mother of ten thousand things.
Ever desireless, one can see the mystery.
Ever desiring, one can see the manifestations.
These two spring from the same source but differ in name;
this appears as darkness.
Darkness within darkness.
The gate to all mystery.*

The Tao is timeless and ancient, imperceptible and indefinable yet ever present:

*From above it is not bright;
From below it is not dark:
An unbroken thread beyond description.
It returns to nothingness.
The form of the formless,
The image of the imageless,
It is called indefinable beyond imagination.
Stand before it and there is no beginning.
Follow it and there is no end.
Stay with the ancient Tao,
Move with the present.*

Knowing the ancient beginning is the essence of Tao. Taoist philosophy is singularly relevant to the modern age because it teaches that nature should not be disrupted:

*Do you think you can take over
the universe and improve it?
I do not believe it can be done.
The universe is sacred.
You cannot improve it.
If you try and change it, you will ruin it.
If you try and hold it, you will lose it.
It also lies beyond simple rules of morality:*

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*A brave and passionate man
will kill or be killed.
A brave and calm man
will always preserve life.
Of these two which is harmful?
Some things are not favoured by heaven.
Who knows why? Even the sage is unsure of this.*

Lao tsu pictures the sage as wild and untamed but in contact with the natural maternal source:

*People have purpose and usefulness
But I alone am ignorant and uncouth
I am different from all the others,
but I draw nourishment from the mother.*

The opposites of male and female, light and dark etc. are not only interdependent, but it is essential for humanity to maintain a receptive relation to the creative Tao. This requires both the feminine receptiveness of the valley of the earth, and the primal pregnancy of the "uncarved block"™, and also an attitude towards leadership and control which is humble and submissive and yields to transition rather than imposing order:

*Know the strength of man,
But keep a woman's care!
Be the stream of the universe,
Ever true and unswerving,
Become as a little child once more.
Know the white,
But keep the black!
Be an example to the world!
Being an example to the world,
Ever true and unwavering,
Return to the infinite.
Know honour and humility.
Be the valley of the universe,
Ever true and resourceful,
Return to the state of the uncarved block.
When the block is carved it becomes useful.
When the sage uses it he becomes the ruler.
Thus, "A great tailor cuts little" (Lao Tsu).*

Thus man follows the feminine earth, rather than heaven and consequently the creative emerges from nature itself:

*Man follows earth.
Earth follows heaven.*

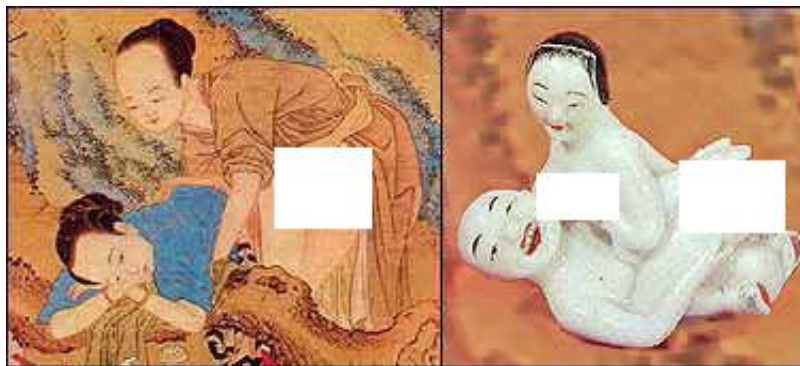
*Heaven follows the tao.
Tao follows what is natural.*

However, despite being in yielding responsiveness to the natural order, the sage possesses the personal power of the shaman:

*He who knows how to live can walk abroad
Without fear of rhinoceros or tiger.
He will not be wounded in battle.
For in him rhinoceroses can find no place
to thrust their horn,
Tigers no place to use their claws,
And weapons no place to pierce.
Why is this so?
Because he has no place for death to enter.*

Lao Tsu naturally saw the machinery of the state as a structured force which ran against the verdant abundance of the Tao:

*The more laws and restrictions there are,
The poorer people become.
The sharper men's weapons,
The more trouble in the land*



Sexual union is central to Taoist thought. Sex roles give both genders the superior position. Despite the patriarchy, ancient matriarchal identification with the land required conserving male energies to maintain relations with many wives (Rawson and Legeza R440).

The Tao also has an active sexual manifestation similar to Tantrism. The natural complementation of male and female sexual energies, ching, as manifestations of life force became elaborated into a technique of gathering vital energies through active love-making while withholding orgasm. This attitude arises from the pursuit of immortality, and origins in matriarchal land title-holding based on yin-earth identification, resulting in polygamy and the need to maintain many active relationships. The inner alchemy of Taoism is closely related to the practices of Tantric yoga, involving similar chakra centers based on sex, heart and mind, derived from Buddhist influences.

Oracle of Sexual Paradox

The I Ching oracle (R593), or book of changes, is a primary example of a sexually paradoxical chance oracle, as it is based on applying uncertainty to the female and male principles of yin and yang. It shows both fundamental Taoist and Confucian influence which was again serendipitously created as a result of incarceration. According to the principles of the I Ching, consciousness, living organisms, and chance are a common manifestation of the cosmic creative principle. Thus the use of chance in throwing the oracle, far from being superstitious faith in the drop of a coin, links to consciousness, uncertainty and to life itself, as with the Urim and Thummim of Judaism, and the Tarot.

Yin and yang are firstly further divided into 8 yin-yang trigrams: ☰ heaven (the creative), ☱ wind (wood), ☵ water (the abyss), ☶ mountain (stillness), ☷ earth (the receptive), ☳ thunder (the arousing), ☲ fire (the clinging), ☱ the lake (joyful). The trigram transformations are then doubled to give 64 hexagrams, whose $64 \times 64 = 4096$ secondary transformations represent a set of archetypal dynamical situations. This set of 64 states have been carefully designed to give a generic set of conditions. Chance is used to generate a reading by throwing sticks or coins. The results of these two methods differ in the greater probabilities the coin oracle give to moving lines.

The origin of the trigrams is said to go back to Fu Hsi a legendary character from the period of hunting and fishing and the invention of cooking. They are thus of such antiquity that they antedate recorded history. The names of the trigrams do not occur anywhere else in Chinese language leading some to suggest they have a foreign origin although this may be simply due to their very ancient nature. King Wen, the progenitor of the Chou dynasty, elaborated the eight trigrams into a vastly larger system of transformations. King Wen is said to have added brief commentaries when he was imprisoned by the tyrant Chou Hsin. Wen was named king posthumously when his son Wu deposed the house of Shang and began the Chou dynasty which lasted 900 years. His son, the Duke of Chou, added the text of the moving lines. Confucius then studied and added to it in his senescence adding the Commentary on the Decision and less directly the Commentary on the Images.

The patriarchal gloss of many translations of the I Ching obscure its essential complementation between yin and yang, and the notion that man's relationship to the nature should be the feminine way of the valley. Several modern interpretations of the I Ching reverse this gloss producing a distinctly feminist emphasis.

Barbara Walker's "I Ching of the Goddess" would read these like this:

Difficulty at the Beginning: "Heavy rains over thunder symbolize the storms of tribulation and trouble... the sages likened such difficulty to a traumatic birth attended by blood and pain."

The Well: "It is said that dwellings can be moved, whole cities can be moved, but the well supplying water for the population can't be moved. The source must remain in its own place. Those who seek it must go there".



3 : Chun / DIFFICULTY AT THE BEGINNING

DIFFICULTY AT THE BEGINNING works supreme success, furthering through perseverance.
Nothing should be undertaken. It furthers one to appoint helpers.

Clouds and thunder: The image of DIFFICULTY AT THE BEGINNING.
Thus the superior man brings order out of confusion.

(1) Hesitation and hindrance. It furthers one to remain persevering.

When an eminent man subordinates himself to his inferiors, he wins the hearts of all people.

(2) Difficulties pile up. Horse and wagon part. He is not a robber; He wants to woo when the times comes.

The maiden is chaste, she does not pledge herself. Ten years - then she pledges.

(3) Whosoever hunts deer without the forester only loses his way in the forest.

The superior man understands the signs of the time and prefers to desist. To go on brings humiliation.

48 : Ching / THE WELL

THE WELL. The town may be changed, but the well cannot be changed.

It neither decreases nor increases. They come and go from the well.

If one gets down almost to the water and the rope does not go all the way,

Or the jug breaks, it brings misfortune.

Water over wood: the image of THE WELL.

Thus the superior man encourages people at their work

And exhorts them to help one another.

The above reading is “difficulty at the beginning” becoming “the well” in the Richard Wilhelm translation (R593).