Historical Introduction

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Warring States Period (403–221 BCE) in which the *Daodejing* was born is fairly named. As time passed, internecine warfare raged with escalating ferocity among the contending states of the central Chinese plains. The killing field casualties rose exponentially as the "art" of warfare progressed from swarming militia to the efficiency of phalanx-like fixed troop formations. At every level of innovation, from the introduction of cavalry, to standard issue crossbows, to siege engines, these instruments of aggression made a folly of defense. Cities were walled and fortified only to be breached; borders were drawn up only to be redrawn; alliances were formed only to be betrayed; treaties were signed only to be reneged upon. For generation after generation, death became a way of life, so that mothers gave birth to sons with the expectation that they would never reach majority.

The eventual outcome was never in doubt. In the race to empire, the game was zero-sum. And to lose was to perish utterly. In the centuries of protracted labor that preceded the birth of this profoundly literate Chinese culture, the most widely circulated texts were not religious or philosophical treatises; they were military handbooks. In fact, most of the philosophers who traveled from court to court were purveyors of wisdom "guaranteed" to lead their patrons to certain victory. And even when their expositions focused on the social and political reforms necessary for a flourishing state, at some point, almost every one of the texts named for them turns to warfare and to the necessity of a strong military.

It was as a response to these darkest of days in which the blood of China's children irrigated the crops and their flesh fertilized the land that the *Daodejing* emerged as an alternative vision of what the human experience might be like. The world was wasting away, and the *Daodejing* was a mysterious elixir that offered to serve as its restorative.

THE NATURE AND APPLICATIONS OF THE *DAODEJING*

The great French sinologist Marcel Granet observed that "Chinese wisdom has no need of the idea of God."[1] Analogously, in this Chinese world in which nothing was "created," including the world itself, the *Daodejing* too appeared without the benefit of efficient cause. Of course the text has long been associated with the sobriquet the "Laozi 老子," or "The Old Master," but the historicity of this rather generic old man is as likely as his name is informative.[2]

What do we know about this authorless text? On the basis of rhetorical patterns and rhymes, William Baxter dates the *Daodejing* to as early as 400 BCE, but suggests early or mid fourth century BCE as its most likely period of compilation.[3] Given that it is widely cited in the late fourth and third century BCE corpus—the *Zhuangzi, Zhanguoce, Lüshi chunqiu, Hanfeizi*, and so on—the text in some form is likely to have appeared earlier rather than later. The 1993 recovery of three distinct bundles of strips dating to about 300 BCE that together constitute a "partial" *Daodejing* from a tomb in Guodian, a village to the north of the ancient Chu capital of Jinancheng in modern-day Hubei province, is consistent with Baxter's estimate. It is not clear whether this Guodian version of the *Daodejing* is itself an interim phase circulating orally in the growth of the complete 81 chapter version, or whether it is someone's abridged version of an already existing complete text. But even in this partial text (however we choose to understand the term "partial"), the explicit anti-Confucian polemic suggests a date of compilation at which the Daoist and the Confucian lineages had already drawn their lines.

Before we speculate on the authorless origins of the *Daodejing*, it might be helpful to address the issue of orality. The relationship between the spoken and written languages of early China has had an important bearing on the past and the future of a text—that is, how a text would emerge over time out of the oral tradition, and how it would be transmitted to future generations. Elsewhere, together with Henry Rosemont, we have argued that:

> Classical Chinese . . . is like the good little boy: it was primarily to be seen and not heard. A person who tried to write a speech in *wenyan* today would end up with a soliloquy. This is not to imply that sounds were and are totally irrelevant to the written language, for some puns and all rhymes, alliteration, and so forth are obviously phonetic in character. Further, such linguistic devices were undoubtedly of enormous value in facilitating the memorization of large tracts of text that could be recalled to fund discussion. What this does imply is the following, which is an important premise for our overall position: spoken Chinese is and was certainly understood aloud; classical Chinese is not now and may never have been understood aloud as a primarily spoken language; therefore spoken and literary Chinese are now and may always have been two distinct linguistic media, and if so, the latter should clearly not be seen as simply a transcription of speech.[4]

The claim that the written language is not a transcription of speech is qualified in this argument by the acknowledgment that in a largely if not primarily oral tradition, much of the language that at some point and for specific reasons comes to be written down has earlier been transmitted from memory, and in this form, enriches refined speech much as the crafted apothegms of Shakespeare, Pope, Nietzsche, and Emerson abound in good intellectual conversation today.

D. C. Lau tells us a lot about the text. In preparing his own translation of the *Daodejing*, he has followed the ubiquitous division of the short text into two books, the "*dao*" classic and the "*de*" classic, and has also respected the further traditional rendering of the text into 81 "chapters." But he takes one additional step in dividing these 81 chapters into 196 sections with even more ad-

ditional subsections, justifying this seeming fragmentation of the work on the basis of internal rhymes and the observation that there is only a very loose sense of textual coherence.[5] Lau also suggests that the rhymed passages that constitute more than half of the text were probably "learned by rote with the meaning explained at length in an oral commentary."[6]

Michael LaFargue offers us some further insight into the nature and function of the *Daodejing*. He argues that the text does not "teach philosophical doctrines" but rather contains "sayings" that fall into two groups: "polemic proverbs" that seek to correct some common assumption ("cheaters never prosper"), and sayings that recommend a certain regimen of self-cultivation.[7] LaFargue makes a further important point in insisting that, contrary to the standard handwringing about the impenetrability of the text, the words usually "conveyed a single definite meaning for a group of people with a shared competence."[8] That is, the sayings that constitute the text were largely meaningful to its anticipated audience within the context of their own historical period and life experience.

If we combine and expand upon the insights that we have rehearsed above, we can make a reasonable conjecture about the provenance, the coherence, and the applications of the *Daodejing*.

First, the fact that remarkably similar bamboo strip and silk manuscript versions of the *Daodejing* are being found in archaeological sites from significantly different times and places testifies to the probability that we are dealing very early on with a canonical "text" if not a widely popular classic. We have put "text" in quotation marks and have used the expression "classic" advisedly because the written form of the work seems to be derivative of an essentially oral tradition.

Indeed, while we might be accustomed to think of such traditions of wisdom literature as being passed down through the written word, beyond the pervasive use of rhyme, there are other rather clear indications that memorization and oral transmission probably played a major role in establishing a common frame of reference for the academic lineages of early China. The pervasive use of differing loan characters in the written forms of the *Daodejing* and

other recovered texts suggests that they represented sounds first and then, by context and inference, ideas. This would mean that they were part of an oral tradition that was written down from memory for some specific purpose, perhaps in this case providing reading material for the now silent tomb occupant in the journey to the nebulous world beyond. The accumulation of written texts also seems to have had a role in the construction of court libraries at state academies that would try to attract the best and brightest scholars of their age, and thus bring prestige to their patrons.

Another factor that would have influenced this process of standardization is the relationship between a rich and redundant spoken language, and "texts" which operate as an oral corpus of economical aphorisms to capture the prevailing wisdom of the time. These combined sayings would be available in the oral language as familiar apothegms that could be used as "topics" to begin discussions, with the possibility of further elaboration occurring in the vernacular language. While there seems to be a certain fluidity in the transmission of these early documents, the recent archaeological finds are uncovering increasingly earlier versions of relatively standardized texts, the *Daodejing* among them, suggesting that rote memorization and "canonization" had some force in consolidating the texts and preserving their integrity.

We would agree with Michael LaFargue that much of the rhymed materials found in the *Daodejing* can be fairly described as a kind of "proverbial" wisdom literature that, rather than offering exposition, seeks to stimulate a sympathetic audience to conjure up the conditions necessary to make its point.[9] A significant quibble with LaFargue, however, would be that these rhymed sayings are not only mnemonic, but are also memorable in the sense of the clever West African proverb-tellers or the evocative epigramatic and scriptural sayings of our own tradition. That is to say, the aphorisms that came to constitute the *Daodejing* should not be confused qualitatively or functionally with the familiar adages that LaFargue uses to make his own point (for example, "nice guys finish last"). Such banal clichés are seldom confused with wit or wisdom. By contrast, the elegant sayings that constitute the

Daodejing are "the sound from the ground," sharing with other such conventional sources a widespread, often informal, dissemination, and the cultural function of sustaining a shared linguistic currency and a common wisdom within a competent population. By "competent" we are following LaFargue in describing an audience with a similar worldview and common sense—precisely those assets lacking in our own contemporary attempts to engage the "text."

It is interesting to reflect on how such conventional sources, encompassing among other things everyday popular songs and their distillation in the *Book of Songs*, functioned to produce meaning and promote different philosophical agendas in the early Chinese corpus. What can be said about this largely oral medium of transmission and communication of songs is perhaps even more true of the layer of selected wisdom sayings that constitute the *Daodejing*.

David Schaberg explores the way in which uncanonical songs underwent a process of historical framing during the Warring States Period and Qin dynasty,[10] when commentators approached a song, often enigmatic and sometimes even incomprehensible, as an encoded means of communication that could only be understood and appreciated by fitting it with, and within, a particular historical anecdote of some interesting individual or event.

A similar process seems to have been at work in the philosophical literature of this period in which canonical songs such as those collected in the *Book of Songs*, presumably widely remembered and sung by the population, were "decoded" when they were used to punctuate a particular philosophical point. That is, one intriguing characteristic of almost all of the classical texts—the *Analects*, *Mozi*, *Mencius*, *Zhongyong*, *Xunzi*, and so on—is that having presented some kind of a philosophical argument they then quite literally break into song. And there seems to be a dividend for both philosopher and song alike in participating and being used in this practice. From the perspective of the song, it is framed and clarified, and is thus reauthorized as a shared and respected repository of ancient meaning. And the philosophers for their trouble get to claim the prestige of a canonical source for the assertion at hand.

The song is a particularly effective addition to the philosophical argument for several reasons. It is persuasive by virtue of being widely known among the audience of the text. Again, the original source of the song is the daily life of the people, where each song is what Schaberg describes as "a manifestation of complete and uncontrollable genuineness."[11] This raw spontaneity and honesty lies in the fact that songs are most often the vehicles of either praise or blame: a public outpouring of approbation for some instance of virtuous conduct, or an irrepressible protest against some injustice. When these philosophical texts repeatedly burst into song, they are taking full advantage of the reader's assumption that such songs do not lie. Thus, when philosophers invoke a song, they not only seek to clarify their arguments, but also seek to attach the indisputable veracity of the song to their claims.

The song further dramatizes the argument and charges it emotionally, bringing the more general and abstract assertions of the text down to earth by locating them in seemingly specific historical situations. Thus, a well-placed song lends veridical force to the philosopher's claims, and at the same time, invests these claims with passion.

It would seem that a great many hands across an expanse of time set down, sorted, re-sorted, edited, and collated the *Daodejing* and the materials that constitute it. Little wonder that the text can initially give its readers the appearance of being fragmentary, disconnected, and occasionally, even of being corrupt. It should not be surprising, then, especially to the modern Western reader who might be used to a more linear and sequential mode of presentation, that the *Daodejing* seems to be something less than a coherent whole. But first impressions in this instance are belied as the architecture of the text emerges from different directions.

First, when we turn to reflect on how the selected wisdom sayings of the *Daodejing* function, we can assume that they, like the repertoire of songs, have a kind of unquestioned veracity that comes from belonging to the people and their tradition. We can further observe that this veracity is made corporate by a reading strategy that co-opts the reader. Two often remarked characteristics of the

Daodejing are palpable absences: it contains no historical detail of any kind, and it offers its readers no doctrines in the sense of general precepts or universalistic laws. The required "framing" of the aphorism by the reader is itself an exercise in nondogmatic philosophizing where the relationship between the text and its student is one of noncoercive collaboration. That is, instead of "the text" providing the reader with a specific historical context or philosophical system, its listeners are required to supply always unique, concrete, and often dramatic scenarios drawn from their own experience to generate the meaning for themselves. This inescapable process in which students through many readings of the text acquire their own unique understanding of its insights informed by their own life experiences is one important element in a kind of constantly evolving coherence. The changing coherence of the text is brought into a sharpening focus as its readers in different times and places continue to make it their own.

Again, there is a greater degree of coherence to the *Daodejing* than a first reading might suggest. Chapters are sometimes grouped around specific themes and subjects. For example, chapters 1 and 2 are centered on the theme of correlativity, chapters 18 and 19 contrast natural and conventional morality, 57 through 61 all begin with recommendations on proper governing of the state, 67 through 69 are about prosecuting war, chapters 74 and 75 deal with political oppression and the common people, and so on. We have appended a thematic index that reveals at least some of such editorial organization.

Another source of coherence in the *Daodejing* lies in the fact that it, like so many classical Chinese texts, is read and appropriated *paronomastically*. That is, a close reading of the text reveals repeated characters and metaphors that awaken in the reader an expanding web of semantic and phonetic associations.

An additional observation to be made is that the rhymed sayings are not themselves a grab-bag miscellany of clever yet sometimes contradictory insights. On the contrary, it would seem that these specific aphorisms have been selected and edited to support the broader purpose of the text. Michael LaFargue and other promi-

nent voices (notably Hal Roth) have argued persuasively that what gives the *Daodejing* its indisputable focus is its overall didactic project. It would seem that the aim of the compilers of the *Daodejing* is to prescribe a regimen of self-cultivation that will enable one to optimize one's experience in the world. These same wisdom passages are an integral element in this process that, when authenticated in the conduct and character of the practitioners, result in their personal transformation. It is important to note that this goal of self-transformation has nothing to do with death, judgment, and an afterlife, nor has it anything to do with the "salvation of the soul" (the traditional concerns of Western eschatology). Instead, such personal growth and consummation is meliorative in the sense of producing the quality of character that makes this world itself a better place.

Having underscored the necessary collaboration between the reader and the text in the production of meaning, we are faced with the question as to our intentions in appending our own commentary after each chapter in this translation. The idea of writing an explanatory "commentary" seems to be as promising in its putative outcome as "explaining" a haiku. The commentary, then, is intended as no more than a suggestive footnote that is successful only to the extent that it sparks the reader's own engagement with the chapter itself. If it is treated as systematic or exhaustive or authoritative, it has ironically betrayed the reader that it is intended to serve.

NOTES TO THE *HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION*

1. Granet (1934):478. In fact, many of the most prominent sinologists, Chinese and Western alike, use their own language, but are quite explicit in rejecting the idea that Chinese cosmology begins from a transcendent Absolute and entails the reality/appearance that arises from such a commitment. See Tang Junyi (1988):100–03, Xiong Shili (1977):180–91, Zhang Dongsun (1995):271–72, Graham (1989):22, Needham (1956): 290, Sivin (1995):3, Hansen (1992):215, Giradot (1983):64.

2. Graham (1990) rehearses the composite legend of a "Laozi" that first came to associate the *Daodejing* with Lao Dan at about 250 BCE.

3. Baxter (1998):233, 249.

4. Ames and Rosemont (1998):38–9.

5. The irony is that terms that are usually used to indicate inference—*gu* 故 and *shiyi* 是以—are often used in the text as mere grammatical markers to link sections that otherwise have little or no connection. See D. C. Lau (1982):139.

6. D. C. Lau (1982):133.

7. LaFargue (1998):263.

8. LaFargue (1998):260.

9. LaFargue (1994):125–74.

10. Schaberg (1999).

11. Schaberg (1999):337.

Philosophical Introduction
Correlative Cosmology—An Interpretive Context

1. OPTIMIZING EXPERIENCE: *THIS FOCUS AND ITS FIELD*

We will argue that *the* defining purpose of the *Daodejing* is bringing into focus and sustaining a productive disposition that allows for the fullest appreciation of those specific things and events that constitute one's field of experience. The project, simply put, is to get the most out of what each of us is: a quantum of unique experience. It is making this life significant. In his early work in articulating the assumptions underlying Chinese natural cosmology, Tang Junyi is saying something similar when he summarizes what he takes to be the most crucial contribution of Chinese culture broadly. It is

> . . . the spirit of the symbiosis and mutuality between particular and totality. In terms of our understanding this means an unwillingness to isolate the particular from the totality, and in terms of feeling, it means the commitment of the particular to do its best to realize the totality.[1]

If this is indeed the defining problematic of the text, it might help us understand at least one insight conveyed in its title, the "*Daodejing*." The scores of translations that have introduced this text to the Western academy have deferred to the difficulty of making sense of the title by conventionally leaving it untranslated. Alternatively they have simply titled it after its putative author, "the Old Master," still leaving it untranslated as the "*Laozi*."

While almost all translators have skirted the problem of rendering the title into English by simply romanizing it as "*Daodejing*," a few earnest souls have stepped up and offered their best effort, each of them emphasizing either a different dimension of the work itself, or a more subjective understanding of what the text means to them. Herbert A. Giles (1886), for example, underscores the always laconic, often opaque, and sometimes even tentative diction of the text in calling it *The Remains of Lao Tzu*. G. G. Alexander (1895) takes a figurist approach, finding in the text echoes of his own religious sensibilities: *Lao-tsze: The Great Thinker with a Translation of His Thoughts on the Nature and Manifestation of God*. Seeming to rescue this protean piece of literature for perhaps gray but always responsible philosophy, Paul Carus and D. T. Suzuki (1913) render the title: *The Canon of Reason and Virtue: Lao Tzu's Tao Teh King*. But "reason" for these scholars turns out to be "Divine Reason" and the "Son of Heaven" is "the High Priest of the people who must bear the sins of mankind."[2] While sensitivity to the religious dimension of the text (albeit a sensitivity derived from a tradition radically different from its own) is its own virtue, the sin of mankind is certainly increased by half in their willingness to reduce the *Daodejing*'s exquisite poetry to rather unremarkable doggerel (even doggerel has its standards). Witness chapter 6:

> The valley spirit not expires,
> Mysterious woman 'tis called by the sires,
> The mysterious woman's door, to boot,
> Is called of heaven and earth the root.
> Forever and aye it seems to endure
> And its use is without effort sure.

Perhaps the most widely known and accepted English translation of the title is Arthur Waley's (1934) *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought*. While seemingly secular and more dynamic, Waley's popular title still suggests our familiar "One-many" metaphysics. In this title, the demonstrative and possessive pronouns nominalize "*the* Way" and isolate it metaphysically as the "One" source of order for a uni-

verse that is ordered by it, locating the energy of creative transformation in this superordinated agency as its "Power." Further, the use of a capital "W" invests this "Way" semantically as a metonym for the transcendent and Divine. Waley's language might sound more liberating, but his title still promises a version of the *Daodejing* located squarely within a worldview more familiar to his readers than relevant to the text.

We want to introduce a translation of the title that attempts, however imperfectly, to capture the defining purpose of the text stated above: bringing into focus and sustaining a productive disposition that allows for the fullest appreciation of those specific things and events that constitute one's field of experience. Of course, there is no one correct translation of the title, *Daodejing*. Were we to give priority to the cosmological insights provided by the text, we might render *Daodejing* as: "The Classic of This Focus (de 德) and Its Field (dao 道)." If instead we wanted to emphasize the outcome of living according to this cosmology, we might translate it as: "Feeling at Home in the World." But with deliberation we choose to underscore the human project that has prompted the articulation of Daoist cosmology and is inspired by it. Thus we translate *Daodejing* as "Making This Life Significant." The Philosophical Introduction that follows will stand as our clarification of this translation, and as an argument that seeks to defend it.

2. DAOIST COSMOLOGY: AN INTERPRETIVE CONTEXT

We begin our argument for translating *Daodejing* as "Making This Life Significant" from Daoist cosmology. Taking a closer look at the interpretation of both the title and the content of the *Daodejing* as "The Classic of This Focus (*de* 德) and Its Field (*dao* 道)," we might first ask what does the expression "this focus" mean? The Daoist correlative cosmology begins from the assumption that the endless stream of always novel yet still continuous situations we encounter are real, and hence, that there is ontological parity among the things and events that constitute our lives. As a parody on

Parmenides, who claimed that "only Being is," we might say that for the Daoist, "only *beings* are," or taking one step further in underscoring the reality of the process of change itself, "only *becomings* are." That is, the Daoist does not posit the existence of some permanent reality behind appearances, some unchanging substratum, some essential defining aspect behind the accidents of change. Rather, there is just the ceaseless and usually cadenced flow of experience.

In fact, the absence of the "One behind the many" metaphysics makes our uncritical use of the philosophic term "cosmology" to characterize Daoism, at least in the familiar classical Greek sense of this word, highly problematic. In early Greek philosophy, the term "kosmos" connotes a clustered range of meanings, including *arche* (originative, material, and efficient cause/ultimate undemonstrable principle), *logos* (underlying organizational principle), *theoria* (contemplation), *nomos* (law), *theios* (divinity), *nous* (intelligibility). In combination, this cluster of terms conjures forth some notion of a single-ordered Divine[3] universe governed by natural and moral laws that are ultimately intelligible to the human mind. This "kosmos" terminology is culturally specific, and if applied uncritically to discuss the classical Daoist worldview, introduces a cultural reductionism that elides and thus conceals truly significant differences.

The Daoist understanding of "cosmos" as the "ten thousand things" means that, in effect, the Daoists have no concept of cosmos at all insofar as that notion entails a coherent, single-ordered world which is in any sense enclosed or defined. The Daoists are, therefore, primarily, "acosmotic" thinkers.[4]

One implication of this distinction between a "cosmotic" and an "acosmotic" worldview is that, in the absence of some overarching *arche* or "beginning" as an explanation of the creative process, and under conditions which are thus "an-archic" in the philosophic sense of this term, although the "nature" of something might indeed refer to "kinds," such "natural kinds" would be no more than generalizations made by analogizing among similar phenomena. That is, difference is prior to identifiable similarities.

The Chinese binomial most frequently translated as *kosmos* is *yuzhou* 宇宙, a term that overtly expresses the interdependence between time and space. The "world" as *shijie* 世界 is likewise expressed literally as the "boundaries between one's generation and the tradition." For ancient China, time pervades everything and is not to be denied. Time is not independent of things, but a fundamental aspect of them. Unlike traditions that devalue both time and change in pursuit of the timeless and eternal, in classical China things are always transforming (*wuhua* 物化). In fact, in the absence of some claim to objectivity that "objectifies" and thus makes "objects" of phenomena, the Chinese tradition does not have the separation between time and entities that would allow for either time without entities, or entities without time—there is no possibility of either an empty temporal corridor or an eternal anything (in the sense of being timeless).

What encourages us within a Western metaphysical tradition to separate time and space is our inclination, inherited from the Greeks, to see things in the world as fixed in their formal aspect, and thus as bounded and limited. If instead of giving ontological privilege to the formal aspect of phenomena, we were to regard them as having parity in their formal and changing aspects, we might be more like classical China in temporalizing them in light of their ceaseless transformation, and conceive of them more as "events" than as "things." In this processual worldview, each phenomenon is some unique current or impulse within a temporal flow. In fact, it is the pervasive and collective capacity of the events of the world to transform continuously that is the actual meaning of time.

A second assumption of Daoist "cosmology" (now using this term "cosmology" under advisement) that follows from this acknowledgment of the reality of both change and the uniqueness that follows from it is that particular "things" are in fact processual events, and are thus *intrinsically* related to the other "things" that provide them context. Said another way, these processual events are porous, flowing into each other in the ongoing transformations we call experience. Formation and function—the shape of things and what they do to whom—are interdependent and mutually de-

termining characteristics of these events. It is for this reason that things resist "definition" in the literal sense of *finis*—a practice that delineates some ostensibly discrete boundary around them, and thus reduces all relations to external, extrinsic transactions. With fluid and shifting boundaries among things, integrity for any particular thing does not mean *being* or *staying* whole, or even actualizing its own internal potential. Rather, integrity is something *becoming whole in its co-creative relationships with other things*. Integrity is consummatory relatedness.

Integrity in this sense of becoming whole in one's relations with other things is a co-creative process in which one shapes and is shaped by one's environing circumstances. Not only is change an integral characteristic of things, but real creativity is a condition of this continuing transformative process. That is, our immediate experience is composed of fluid, porous events that entail both persistence and the spontaneous emergence of novelty, both continuity and disjunction. In this evolving order, there is at once a familiar rhythm to life, and the newness of each moment.

The irrepressible presencing of novelty within the context of what already exists guarantees the uniqueness of each emerging event, and preempts notions such as strict, linear causality, absolute predictability, and reversibility. The world is ever new. And the propensity of things—the force of circumstances—inching ahead in its seeming ineluctability, is always underdetermined, attended as it is by the contingency of real novelty.

In our introduction to *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the* Zhongyong, we introduce a distinction between power and creativity, and follow A. N. Whitehead in questioning the appropriateness of using "creativity" in the familiar *creatio ex nihilo* model that we associate with Judeo-Christian cosmogony. Whitehead argues that any robust sense of creativity requires that creativity itself is more primordial than God.

In the received Judeo-Christian tradition, the all-*power*ful God *determines* things, *makes* things. God, as Omnipotent Other Who commands the world into being, is *Maker* of the world, not its

Creator. In the presence of the perfection that is God, nothing can be added or taken away. There can be no novelty or spontaneity. Thus, all subsequent acts of "creativity" are in fact secondary and derivative exercises of power. Creativity can make sense only in a processual world that admits of ontological parity among its constitutive events and of the spontaneous emergence of novelty.

Power is to be construed as the production of intended effects determined by external causation. Real creativity, on the other hand, entails the spontaneous production of novelty, irreducible through causal analysis. Power is exercised with respect to and over others. Creativity is always reflexive and is exercised over and with respect to "self." And since self in a processive world is always communal, creativity is contextual, transactional, and multidimensional. Thus creativity is both *self*-creativity and *co*-creativity. Either everything shares in creativity, or there is no creativity. Indeed, it is this transactional, co-creative character of all creative processes that precludes the project of self-cultivation and self-*creation* from being egoistic.

One further point can be made with respect to the creativity that the spontaneous emergence of novelty makes possible. The radical sense of creativity that we associate with "bringing into being" in a *creatio ex nihilo* sensibility is too isolated and extreme for this idea within the Daoist tradition. The term *dao*, like the terms "building," "learning," and "work," entails both the process and the created product. It is the locus and the time frame within which the always contextualized creativity takes place.

When the *Zhuangzi* observes that "we are one with all things 萬物與我爲一," this insight is a recognition that each and every unique phenomenon is continuous with every other phenomenon within one's field of experience. But is this an exhaustive claim: are we talking about *all* phenomena in the continuing present? Because the world is processional and because its creativity is *ab initio* rather than *ex nihilo*—a contextual creativity expressed across the careers of its constitutive phenomena—any answer to this question would have to be provisional. Phenomena are never either atomistically discrete or complete. The *Zhuangzi* recounts:

> With the ancients, understanding had gotten somewhere. Where was that? Its height, its extreme, that to which no more could be added, was this: Some of these ancients thought that there had never begun to be things. The next lot thought that there are things, but that there had never begun to be boundaries among them. . . .[5]

A third assumption in the Daoist "cosmology" is that life broadly construed is entertained through and only through these same phenomena that constitute our experience. The field of experience is always construed from one perspective or another. There is no view from nowhere, no external perspective, no decontextualized vantage point. We are all in the soup. The intrinsic, constitutive relations that obtain among things make them reflexive and mutually implicating, residing together within the flux and flow.

This mutuality does not in any way negate the uniqueness of the particular perspective. Although any and all members of a family have implicated within them and thus present (rather than represent) the entire family, all members constitute and experience the family from their own particular point of view. And members in making the family their own quite appropriately have a distinctive proper name.

A corollary to this radical perspectivism is that each particular element in our experience is holographic in the sense that it has implicated within it the entire field of experience. This single flower has leaves and roots that take their nourishment from the environing soil and air. And the soil contains the distilled nutrients of past growth and decay that constitute the living ecological system in which all of its participants are organically interdependent. The sun enables the flower to process these nutrients, while the atmosphere that caresses the flower also nourishes and protects it. By the time we have "cashed out" the complex of conditions that conspire to produce and conserve this particular flower, one ripple after another in an ever-extending series of radial circles, we have implicated the entire cosmos within it without remainder. For the Daoist, there is an intoxicating bottomlessness to any particular event in our experience. The entire cosmos resides happily in the smile on the dirty face of this one little child.

If the insistent particular (*de* 德) is holographic, how does differentiation occur among particular things? In the human community, for example, what does it mean for a person to become distinguished and an object of deference?

First, this holographic sensibility is not simply Daoist, but a shared commitment of classical Chinese natural cosmology. The Confucian Mencius, for example, is also articulating this classical Chinese common sense when he interprets the field of *qi* in terms of moral energy and offers his advice on the attainment of human excellence. He speaks of his ability to nourish his "flood-like *qi* (*haoran zhi qi* 浩然之氣)," describing this *qi* as that which is "most vast (*zhida* 至大)" and "most firm (*zhigang* 至剛)."[6] Restated in the language of focus and field, Mencius is saying that his "flood-like *qi*" has the greatest "extensive" and "intensive" magnitudes. This language of extensive field and intensive focus suggests that one nourishes one's *qi* most successfully by making of oneself the most integral focus of the most extensive field of *qi*. In this manner, one gains greatest virtue (excellence, potency) in relation to the most far-reaching elements of one's environs. As we read in the *Mencius*:

> Everything is here in me. There is no joy greater than to discover creativity (*cheng* 誠) in one's person and nothing easier in striving to be authoritative in one's conduct (*ren* 仁) than committing oneself to treating others as one would oneself be treated.[7]

Our argument for translating *cheng* 誠 as "creativity" in this *Mencius* passage is that its more familiar translations as "sincerity" and "integrity" in fact reference a creative process. "Sincerity" as affective tone is the ground of growth in mutual relationships, and "integrity" is the "becoming one" that occurs as we become intimate. The deepening of these relationships that in sum constitute us as a person is a profoundly co-creative process of "doing and undergoing," of shaping and being shaped.

The Daoist variation on the efficacy of one's "flood-like *qi*" is the way in which the intensive focus of one's insistent particularity (*de* 德) provides the most extensive range of influence or potency in

shaping one's world. Said simply, persons who "have their stuff together" change the world around them. In chapter 54 of the *Daodejing*, the cultivation of personal excellence is described as the starting point in world-making and in enhancing the ethos of the cosmos:

> Cultivate it in your person,
> And the character you develop will be genuine;
> Cultivate it in your family,
> And its character will be abundant;
> Cultivate it in your village,
> And its character will be enduring;
> Cultivate it in the state,
> And its character will flourish;
> Cultivate it in the world,
> And its character will be all-pervading.

This relationship between intensive resolution and extensive influence is also captured in chapter 23:

> Thus, those who are committed to way-making in what they do
> Are on their way.
> Those who are committed to character in what they do
> Achieve this character
> While those who lose it
> Are themselves lost.
> Way-making is moreover enhanced by those who express character,
> Just as it is diminished by those who themselves have lost it.

Optimizing experience by getting the most out of it requires a kind of "husbanding" of one's resources, where "husbanding" is understood as a combination of cultivation and frugality. High resolution in one's character elevates one as a focal presence and as an enduring influence on the extended community through the patterns of deference that have come to define one's person. This achieved character provides the world with a resource for resolving its problems as they arise. Such is the import of chapter 59:

> For bringing proper order to the people and in serving *tian*,
> Nothing is as good as husbandry.

It is only through husbandry that you come early to accept the way,
And coming early to accept the way is what is called redoubling
your accumulation of character.
If you redouble your accumulation of character, all obstacles can be
overcome,
And if all obstacles can be overcome, none can discern your limit.
Where none can discern your limit,
You can preside over the realm.
In presiding over the mother of the realm
You can be long-enduring.

In this processual Daoist cosmology, continuity is prior to individuality, and the particular character or disposition of each event is thus an ongoing distinctive achievement. That is, each event distinguishes itself by developing its own uniqueness within the totality. And freedom is neither the absence of constraint nor some isolatable originality, but the full contribution of this achieved uniqueness to a shared community.

A fourth presupposition of Daoist cosmology is that we are not passive participants in our experience. The energy of transformation lies within the world itself as an integral characteristic of the events that constitute it. There is no appeal to some external efficient cause: no Creator God or primordial determinative principle. In the absence of any preordained design associated with such an external cause, this energy of transformation is evidenced in the mutual accommodation and co-creativity that is expressed in the relations that obtain among things. When turned to proper effect, this energy can make the most of the creative possibilities of any given situation. This kind of responsive participation we have characterized elsewhere as *ars contextualis*: the art of contextualizing.[8] *Ars contextualis* is a way of living and relating to a world that quite simply seeks to get the most out of the diversity of experience.

3. GETTING THE MOST OUT OF ONE'S INGREDIENTS

The reality of time, novelty, and change; the persistence of particularity; the intrinsic, consitutive nature of relationships; the perspectival

nature of experience—taken together, these several presuppositions that ground the Daoist worldview and provide Daoism with its interpretative context set the terms for optimizing our experience. Or said in a more metaphorical way, there is a strategy in the *Daodejing* for getting the most out of the ingredients of our lives.

The Confucian focus on the family (*jia* 家) serves as a starting point for understanding this Daoist sensibility, for the Confucian project of self-consummation, although decidedly different in its parameters, has a similar objective. We have argued elsewhere that the family serves as a pervasive metaphor for social, political, and even religious relations within the Confucian worldview.[9] The *Analects* 1.2 states explicitly that the way of conducting oneself most productively as a human being emerges out of the achievement of robust filial relations:

> Exemplary persons (*junzi* 君子) concentrate their efforts on the root, for the root having taken hold, the way (*dao* 道) will grow therefrom. As for filial and fraternal responsibility, it is, I suspect, the root of authoritative conduct (*ren* 仁).

The underlying assumption is that persons are more likely to give themselves utterly and unconditionally to their families than to any other human institution. Thus, the family as an institution provides the model for the process of making one's way by allowing the persons who constitute it both to invest in, and to get the most out of, the collective human experience. Promoting the centrality of family relations is an attempt to ensure that entire persons without remainder are invested in each of their actions.

The power of the family to function as the radial locus for human growth is much enhanced when natural family and communal relations are perceived as being exhaustive, without being construed as a distraction from, in competition with, or dependent upon any more fundamental relations, especially those characteristic of transcendental religiousness. It is from the family expanding outward that persons emerge as objects of profound communal, cultural, and ultimately religious deference, where the focus of religious rev-

erence remains ancestral rather than supernatural or otherworldly. Human relations, far from being subordinated to one's relationship with one's God, are the concrete locus out of which religious feelings emerge.

Ambrose King makes the argument that relationships within the classical Chinese cosmology are construed broadly in familial terms.[10] We have gone further in suggesting that family is a more adequate metaphor than Joseph Needham's notion of "organism" for thinking about Chinese cosmology, and that arguably *all* relationships within this world are familial.[11] This metaphor certainly has application to the *Daodejing,* where rulership as an institution is naturalized on the model of the family, and explicit images of human procreativity—mother and infant—are projected onto the cosmos.

In fact, the sustained Grand Analogy that pervades the *Daodejing* is: *dao* is to the world as ruler ought to be to the people. *Dao*—the discernible rhythm and regularity of the world as it unfolds around and through us—is nonimpositional: "Way-making (*dao*) really does things noncoercively."[12] This attitude is carried over into the human world. In governing effectively, coercion is perceived as impoverishing and dehumanizing. So the consummate political model in Daoism, corresponding to the consummate experience itself, is described as *wuwei* ("noncoercive activity") and *ziran* ("self-so-ing," or "what is spontaneously so"). As stated in chapter 17, under the sway of nonimpositional rulership, the people are able to be spontaneous.

> With the most excellent rulers, their subjects only know that they are there,
> The next best are the rulers they love and praise,
> Next are the rulers they hold in awe,
> And the worst are the rulers they disparage. . . .
> With all things accomplished and the work complete
> The common people say, "We are spontaneously like this."

Spontaneity must be clearly distinguished from randomness and impetuosity. In fact, far from being "uncaused," it is the novelty

made possible by a cultivated disposition. Spontaneity is the punctuated flow and pressure of the calligrapher's brush; it is the singing dexterity of Cook Ding's cleaver.

Spontaneous action is a mirroring response. As such, it is action that accommodates the "other" to whom one is responding. It takes the other on its own terms. Such spontaneity involves recognizing the continuity between oneself and the other, and responding in such a way that one's own actions promote the interests and well-being both of oneself and of the other. This does not lead to reductive imitation but to complementarity and coordination. Handshakes and embraces are actions that presuppose a recognition of the relational stance of the other, and that complete that stance. In the dancehall of the cosmos, when the music for the next dance starts to play and partners open their arms to each other, the dance proceeds as a dyadic harmony of nonassertive actions.

4. APPRECIATING THE PARTICULAR

This Daoist theme of optimizing experience might be explored more concretely by borrowing a memorable passage from William James. James alludes to a classical Western nursery rhyme—yet another kind of "sound from the ground"—to reflect on precisely the issue of how to get the most out of one's life experience. He at once asks and answers the question "What Makes a Life Significant?":

> Every Jack sees in his own particular Jill charms and perfections to the enchantment of which we stolid onlookers are stone-cold. And which has the superior view of the absolute truth, he or we? Which has the more vital insight into the nature of Jill's existence, as a fact? Is he in excess, being in this matter a maniac? Or are we in defect, being victims of a pathological anesthesia as regards Jill's magical importance? Surely the latter; surely to Jack are the profounder truths revealed; surely poor Jill's palpitating little life-throbs *are* among the wonders of creation, *are* worthy of this sympathetic interest; and it is to our shame that the rest of us cannot feel like Jack. For Jack realizes Jill concretely, and we do not. He struggles toward a union with her inner life, divining her feelings, anticipating her desires,

> understanding her limits as manfully as he can, and yet inadequately, too; for he is also afflicted with some blindness, even here. Whilst we, dead clods that we are, do not even seek after these things, but are contented that that portion of eternal fact named Jill should be for us as if it were not. Jill, who knows her inner life, knows that Jack's way of taking it—so importantly—is the true and serious way; and she responds to the truth in him by taking him truly and seriously, too. May the ancient blindness never wrap its clouds about either of them again! Where would any of *us* be, were there no one willing to know us as we really are or ready to repay us for *our* insight by making recognizant return? We ought, all of us, to realize each other in this intense, pathetic, and important way.
>
> If you say that this is absurd, and that we cannot be in love with everyone at once, I merely point out to you that, as a matter of fact, certain persons do exist with all enormous capacity for friendship and for taking delight in other people's lives; and that such persons know more of truth than if their hearts were not so big.[13]

What is particularly instructive about this excerpt from James is his claim that the site of knowing the truth about Jill is Jack's heart. Both the magical importance of Jill as someone valued and the absolute truth about Jill as a matter of fact are realized concretely in these immediate feelings. Persons are constituted by their relationships, and these relations are valorized and made real in the process of persons bringing their fields of experience into focus. And it is Jack who focuses Jill with optimum resolution. The unmediated acknowledgment of Jill as one of the wonders of creation resides in the affective relationships that give her context, particularly, her Jack. This is only to say that the creative transactions—the doings and undergoings among persons—are a disclosure of their feelings for one another. Thus, affective tone and the subjective form of feeling are always entailed in the uniquely perspectival locus of the co-creative process. We feel our way forward into novel experience.

When we turn to the Chinese language in which this Daoist worldview is sedimented, James's insight into the inseparability of fact and value—the cognitive and the affective, thinking and feel-

ing—is revealed in its own way. The character *xin* 心, often translated rather awkwardly as "heart-and-mind," is itself an argument for the assumed indivisibility of knowing and feeling within this antique tradition.

Xin is a stylized pictograph of the aorta, associating it quite immediately with the "heart" and the emotional connotations that attend it. The fact that the character *qing* 情 that we translate as "emotions" or "feelings" is a combination of this *xin* 心 and a phonetic element, *qing* 青, justifies this understanding.[14] Indeed, many if not most of the characters that entail some dimension of "emotions" and "feelings" have *xin* as a component element.

However, the fact that *xin* has as often been rendered as "mind" should also alert us to the possible inadequacy of simply translating it as "heart." Many if not most of the Chinese characters that refer to different modalities of "thinking" are also constructed with *xin* as a component. Indeed, there are many passages in these classical texts that would not make sense in English unless the *xin* "thinks."

The point is that in this classical Chinese worldview broadly conceived, the mind cannot be divorced from the heart. There are no altogether rational thoughts devoid of feeling, nor any raw feelings altogether lacking in cognitive content. Having said this, the prejudice to which Daoism is resolutely resistant is the dichotomy between the cognitive and the affective that would privilege knowing as some separate cognitive activity. A. N. Whitehead expresses this same concern when he observes that: ". . . mothers can ponder many things in their hearts that words cannot express."[15] Concrete feelings, the real site of knowing, become selectively abstracted and impoverished when they are resolved into the rational currency of names, concepts, and theories without adequate deference to the affective ground of this cognitive superstructure.

In this early Chinese natural cosmology in which process and change have priority over form and stasis, it is frequently observed that, with respect to the common sense understanding of the human body, physiology has priority over anatomy, and function takes precedence over site. In this resolutely nondualistic worldview, the

xin, then, is primarily a dynamic system that is metonymically associated with but in no way exhausted by, its dense center, the anatomical heart-and-mind. This being the case, it might well be argued that *xin* means primarily "thinking and feeling," and then derivatively and metaphorically, the organs with which these experiences are allied.

In the passage cited above, James allows that every Jack is "enchanted" by the charms and perfections of his own particular Jill. The enchantment in the "thoughtful" feelings of Jack and Jill emerges in their mutual and reciprocated sensitivity and awareness. This kind of shared appreciation means several things. Certainly, they recognize better than most the quality, significance, and magnitude of each other, and in so doing, admire each other greatly. But this burgeoning capacity for mutual appreciation goes well beyond simply a personal enjoyment of each other that begins and ends in their relationship. Indeed this appreciation spills over to become "value-added"—quite literally raising the value of the cosmos in which they occur. Their shared cosmos is much appreciated, becoming a more magnificent time and place because of the profound feelings Jack and Jill have for each other. It is this capacity of the human experience to enchant the cosmos, then, that is the more important meaning of "appreciating the particular."

5. THE MUTUAL ENTAILING OF OPPOSITES

In the *Book of Changes*, experience itself is defined simply as a succession of *yin* and *yang* phases: 一陰一陽之謂道. This description is an abstract way of making the empirical observation that all predicates give way to their opposites: order and disorder succeed each other, and so on. This characteristic of experience is ascribed to the natural cyclical movement of *qi* rather than some supernatural force, and is captured and made explicit in the metaphorical language of *yinyang* 陰陽 and the five phases 五行 cosmology.

As chapter 40 of the *Daodejing* observes, the mutual entailing of opposites means that whatever "goes out" and becomes consummately distinct, also "returns":

"Returning" is how way-making moves,
And "weakening" is how it functions.
The events of the world arise from the determinate,
And the determinate arises from the indeterminate.

The most basic meaning of "returning" restates what has been said above. As Tang Junyi reports, cosmology is not simply a linear zero-sum victory of order over chaos driven by some external cause, but rather is the endless alternation between rising and falling, emerging and collapsing, moving and attaining equilibrium that is occasioned by its own internal energy of transformation.[16] This cosmic unfolding is not "cyclical" in the sense of reversibility and replication, but is rather a continuing spiral that is always coming back upon itself and yet is ever new.

It is the disposition of all things that their present condition entails its opposite. The *Daodejing* observes in chapter 58:

It is upon misfortune that good fortune leans,
It is within good fortune itself that misfortune crouches in ambush,
And where does it all end?

This insight into the mutuality of opposites has several implications. Perhaps most obviously, young is "young-becoming-old"; dark is "dark-becoming-light"; soft is "soft-becoming-hard." In the fullness of time, any and all of the qualities that define each event will yield themselves up to their opposites. Those who are born into the world and live to grow old will eventually die. Anything that embarks upon this journey toward fruition has in its first few steps set off on the long road home. And it is at the moment of setting out as a newborn infant that a person has maximum potency. Thus, the journey can fairly be characterized both as a returning and a gradual weakening of one's initial promise. And it is by effectively husbanding this potency over one's career that one is able to make the most of one's experience.

By anticipating the changes in your conditions, and by remaining focused despite the unavoidable vicissitudes that are visited upon you as you move along the continuum from beginning to end, you are able to optimize the possibilities at each moment and thus en-

joy the ride to its fullest. Cultivating a proper disposition and being prepared for the seasons through which you pass from birth to death will enable you to consistently get the most out of your circumstances. It is your resolution—the intensity found at the center—that will keep your life experience in focus, establish you as an object of deference, and enable you to enjoy both a productive life and a healthy death.

Said another way, to lose focus and stray off course along the way while on this journey will precipitate reversion. Squandered energy while young will age you prematurely. As it says in chapter 55:

> For something to be old while in its prime
> Is called a departure from the way of things.
> And whatever departs from the way of things will come to an untimely end.

Aggression directed at others will, like Monsieur Guillotine's guillotine, come back to shorten your own life. Again, as in chapter 74:

> To stand in for the executioner in killing people
> Is to stand in for the master carpenter in cutting his lumber.
> Of those who would thus stand in for the master carpenter,
> Few get away without injuring their own hands.

The world around us is always an interface between persistent form and novelty, the familiar honeycombed by the unexpected. The new emerges within the context and the security of the ordinary, and in due course, what was new overtakes and supplants the ordinary, and what was ordinary becomes an increasingly fragile memory for those who can still remember. In time, the new becomes the newly ordinary, and the ordinary returns whence it came.

6. AESTHETIC HARMONY

At this point we would like to introduce a few technical terms of aesthetic analysis that might be applied in explaining the particularly Daoist mode of attaining and sustaining harmony. This vocabulary is drawn from the work of A. N. Whitehead's *Process and*

Reality, a philosophical work that is grounded in an aesthetic sense of order.[17]

According to Whitehead, there are four fundamental variables that contribute to the achievement of that harmony deriving from a balance of simplicity and complexity. These variables are *triviality*, *vagueness*, *narrowness*, and *width*.

Triviality involves an excess of differentiation. It is complexity without contrast. An order is trivial when it is characterized by an excess of differentiation among its elements, all of which are entertained equally and are given equal importance. Systems theory would call triviality an excess of information leading to the production of dissonance: it is mere "noise." It is chaos. There is no organizing strategy, no hierarchy, no differential importance. This is sheer multiplicity without focus or discretion.

Vagueness, as Whitehead uses the term, is an excess of identification. In a vague order, the differences among items are irrelevant factors in constituting the order. It is simplicity without contrast. The vague order displays an undifferentiated commonality of character. Vagueness is a bland field without particular focus; it is the facile and unconsidered use of generalizations.

Narrowness is an emphasis upon certain components in an order at the expense of others. It is simplicity in search of intense contrast. An order dominated by narrowness has an intensity of focus that backgrounds all other strongly differentiated factors. Matter-of-fact gives way to importance.

Finally, *width* involves the coordination of differentiated elements, each with its own unique contribution to the order. It is complexity that sacrifices some contrast for depth and scope. The kind of discussion one would hope to have in an interdisciplinary university seminar would likely contribute to an order characterized by width. Width involves the balancing of narrowness and vagueness.

A productive order has all four characteristics in various forms of background/foreground combinations. Vagueness, and the mild identification it entails, when focused by the narrow, produces the contrasts appropriate to the production of harmony. Contrast in-

volves the interweaving of triviality and vagueness through a shifting foreground/background gestalt, while the depth of contrast in an order is a function of its degree of complexity.

The *Daodejing* centers its discussion on cultivating the most productive relationship between the vagueness of the continuous field of experience and the narrowness of the insistent particulars. One pervasive theme of the text is that coercive, contentious activity diminishes the balance between focus and field. On the other hand, noncoercive relatedness encourages width, and the alternation between vagueness and triviality provides contrast.

The abstractness of the *Daodejing* and the absence of any concrete, illustrative examples trades potential complexity and intensity that would be provided by these specific cases for an accommodating width, thus allowing it to be broad in its relevance and application. The role of the reader, then, is to supply the narrowness needed to create the intensity and deepen the degree of contrast.

This language of aesthetic analysis can be regarded as germane to the dispute between the naturalistic Daoists and the more narrowly human-centered Confucians that we find both in the *Daodejing* and the *Analects of Confucius*, and in the tradition more broadly conceived. From a Confucian point of view, the vagueness of human relatedness is brought into focus through the performance of hierarchical roles and formal practices (*li* 禮). Through these ritualizing institutions all human beings are able to take a stand, and to find their place by establishing a value that is relative to the value of other members of their community. Ritualized living is an instrument for personalizing institutions and registering the narrowness and intensity of each human perspective, while allowing for enough width to promote effective tolerance. The Confucian argument would insist that the narrowness of human concerns provides the necessary intensity, while the Daoist's exaggerated inclusiveness would move humanity beyond productive "width" in the direction of a nonproductive vagueness.

Thus, the central complaint of the Confucian about the Daoist vision of things is in the vagueness of the latter. In fact, the Confu-

cian accuses the Daoist explicitly of sacrificing the intensity that comes with a narrow focus for an inclusiveness that is too thin and diffuse.[18]

In response, the Daoist, as a student of the arts of the Chaos clan, would insist that the Confucian claim to narrowness is bogus. Indeed, the insistent particularity *(de)* of human beings and the possible intensity of their natural feelings is trivialized by recourse to contrived rules and artificial relationships that are dehumanizing, and by strategies for social regulation that privilege an ordered uniformity over spontaneity. Further, the absence of concern about the natural environment transforms Confucian narrowness into a kind of intolerance and exclusiveness that jeopardizes the depth of contrast and the intensity of one's experience provided by appropriate width. Confucian narrowness, the Daoist might well argue, leads socially to nepotism, parochialism, and jingoism, and within the natural environment, to anthropocentrism, speciesism, and the pathetic fallacy.[19] For the Daoist, the only guarantee of a viable narrowness would be to allow for the nontrivialized expression of each perspective in the environment to be registered and accounted for, human and otherwise. Indeed, *li* and its perceived intolerance of the world beyond the human community leads to a thinness of experience, and with it, a diminution of imagination and creativity.

The Daoist's guarantee against vagueness lies in an achieved disposition that is made manifest in the appropriate exercise of the *wu*-forms: *wuwei* 無爲, or noncoercive actions in deference to the *de* ("particular focus") of things; *wuzhi* 無知, or knowing that does not have recourse to rules or principles; and *wuyu* 無欲, or desiring that does not seek to possess or control its object. The deference implicit in these *wu*-forms facilitates width as an appropriate combination of triviality and vagueness, while maintaining the narrowness and the focus of insistent particularity.

The point of this technical aside is a simple enough one: The interfusion of the variables leading to a balanced complexity of experience involves recourse to distinctly nonlogical criteria. There is no means of establishing the superiority of triviality, or vagueness, or narrowness, or width, one over the other because these are all

presuppositions of a realized order. Nor is there any final science that could advise one as to the correct intermixing of these aspects of order.

Similarly, consistent with the Daoist resistance to asserting any certitude or final vocabulary, there is no way of saying that Confucianism or Daoism is ultimately superior to the other by virtue of an appeal to univocal criteria. Nor is there any means of separating the two movements into distinctive schools on the basis of orthodoxies of belief or practice. There is no final truth either about the nature of things, or about the means whereby that nature is sought. The achievement of order and harmony in nature and society—that is to say, the achievement of effective way-making or *dao*—is a multifaceted effort that is dependent less upon uncovering true principles or right forms of conduct than on the exercise of imagination and creativity within the most deferential of contexts. In fact, the broadest context—the one leading to the richest resources for Chinese "way-makers"—has been built from the contributions of both the Confucian and the Daoist sensibilities.

7. AWARENESS

The *Daodejing* encourages a comprehensive, processual view of experience that requires a full understanding of the larger picture and the ability to locate and appreciate the particular event within it. This broad view of the field of experience allows one to contextualize particular events, and it provides the peripheral vision needed to stay focused at the center while at the same time anticipating future turns.

What does it mean to achieve resolution in one's disposition by "keeping to the center" and "remaining focused"? By appealing to what Tang Junyi has captured in the expression *yiduo bufenguan* 一多不分觀—translatable as "the inseparability of one and many, of continuity and multiplicity, of *dao* and the myriad of insistent particulars (*de*)"—we can identify two mutually reinforcing levels of awareness advocated in the *Daodejing*: what we might call focal awareness and field awareness.

In order to influence and anticipate the general flow of circumstances, we must have a focused awareness of each of the particular events that constitute our experience. We must be aware of the one as it is implicated in and influences the many. This kind of awareness is to see the world focally in terms of the insistent particulars (*de*) that constitute it. And in order to best understand any one of these events and bring it fully into focus, we must be aware of the field of conditions that conspire to sponsor and sustain it. We must be aware of the many conditions as they are implicated in and are continuous with the one event. This kind of awareness is to see the insistent particular more broadly in terms of the continuous flow of experience (*dao*). The field can only be entered through the particular focus, and the complexity of the focus can only be appreciated by extending the field. Thus, a focal awareness and a field awareness presuppose each other.

One insight governing field awareness is that it requires a full cognizance of the mutual entailment of opposites, allowing one to track one's collaboration in any particular situation through its inevitable process of reversion. It foregrounds the relational character of the elements within the matrix of events, and the symbiotic continuities that obtain among them. This kind of insight—the capacity to see where a situation has come from and to anticipate where it is going—discourages any proclivity one might have to isolate things, and to make exclusive judgments about them on the basis of any particular phase in their continuing narrative.

A student of the martial arts may become discouraged because his or her initial attempts at reproducing the proper form of a roundhouse kick are slow and embarrassingly unsuccessful, while at the same time other more supple students may gain immediate proficiency. A field awareness would anticipate that this student's initial lack of suppleness will, in the course of training, be transformed into the tension that, like a taut spring, produces the power of the properly executed technique. A weakness becomes a strength when what is inflexible becomes more supple.

Focal awareness, on the other hand, is the full appreciation of the particular foci that constitute any particular field as the con-

crete medium through which field awareness is sustained. A subtle understanding of the uniqueness of each event and the attention to the minutia that affect it enables one to anticipate the evolving order, and to encourage or discourage fluctuations at an incipient phase before they have evolved into the full-blown weight of circumstances. All major events are modest in their beginnings, and minor alterations introduced at an early stage of an ongoing event can have cascading consequences for the outcome.

Several defining aspects of focal order condition our awareness of it. The first of these conditions is the temporal immediacy of the continuing present: order is always located in the "very now." The second condition is spatial immediacy: order starts here and goes there. Third, focal order is always collaborative: all relations, while they are intrinsic and thus constitutive, are also projective and recursive. And finally, equilibrium in one's disposition allows one to contextualize events on their own terms and to achieve an optimally productive harmony.

The "art" in any martial art lies in tailoring it to the strengths and weaknesses, both psychological and physical, of the particular student. The fullest degree of competence comes as a function of optimizing this uniqueness. A great deal of care must be taken at the most elementary stages of training to establish "habits of mind and body," again both psychological and physical, that lead to a maximizing of the developing skill and allow for the emergence of one's particularity. Training is a combination of awareness and feeling. And one must remain resolutely focused in one's entire person through the changing seasons of one's practice. Success in the martial arts, as in all experience, lies ultimately in the satisfaction students gain in knowing that they have made the most of their experience in all of its changing phases.

A full appreciation of particularity requires that we understand and be responsive to the complex patterns of relatedness implicated in any event. These patterns are endlessly manifold and diverse, and their ever-changing novelty makes them constantly unique and distinctive. But again this novelty is always *ab initio* and *in situ*, occurring within an already familiar context. Indeterminacy and

the possibility for spontaneity are real, and there are gaps in the sequence of events that preclude absolute predictability and precise causal analysis. But there is also a fluid continuity that is captured in expressions such as "passing" and "returning." It is in appreciating both this continuity and the emergent novelty of experience that we are able to deal with events in terms of the mutual implication of opposites.

The *Daodejing* enjoins us to cultivate those habits of awareness that allow us to plumb and appreciate the magic of the ordinary and the everyday. Indeed, it is by enchanting the routine that we are on the way to making this life truly significant.

8. THE *WU* 無-FORMS

The compilers of the *Daodejing* seek rather explicitly to develop a contrast between the glimpses of insight this text strives to impart, and the substance of other philosophical doctrines. Many if not most doctrines evolve with their antecedents in an elaborate genealogy of values and ideas. These philosophical doctrines are often hierarchically structured by precepts and governing principles, and they may well require an extended course of study for their mastery and transmission. The precepts that inform these "doctrines" are professionalized by their learned "doctors," and within their marble academies these erudites—for appropriate status and recompense—are only too glad to amaze the *hoi poloi* with the flashing dexterity of their philosophic thrusts and parries.

What the *Daodejing* has to offer, on the other hand, is much simpler. It encourages the cultivation of a disposition that is captured in what we have chosen to call its *wu*-forms. The *wu*-forms free up the energy required to sustain the abstract cognitive and moral sensibilities of technical philosophy, allowing this energy, now unmediated by concepts, theories, and contrived moral precepts, to be expressed as those concrete feelings that inspire the ordinary business of the day. It is through these concrete feelings that one is able to know the world and to optimize the human experience.

The abstraction of the concrete ethical dimension of such felt knowing into a formal moralist vocabulary is rehearsed in chapter 38 of the *Daodejing*:

> Thus, only when we have lost sight of way-making is there excellence,
> Only when we have lost sight of excellence is there authoritative conduct,
> Only when we have lost sight of authoritative conduct is there appropriateness,
> And only when we have lost sight of appropriateness is there ritual propriety.
>
> As for ritual propriety, it is the thinnest veneer of doing one's best and making good on one's word,
> And it is the first sign of trouble.
> "Foreknowledge" is tinsel decorating the way,
> And is the first sign of ignorance.
>
> It is for this reason that persons of consequence:
> Set store by the substance rather than the veneer
> And by the fruit rather than the flower.
> Hence, eschewing one they take the other.

The moral precepts described in the first two stanzas emerge as objects of reverence, but as hallowed as they might become, they are anemic when compared to the love and life of concrete, spontaneous feelings. It is the "substance" and the "fruit"—the passionate experience of life itself—rather than a catechism of bloodless ethical principles, that is the real site of knowing. Such felt knowing is an ongoing process of focal and field awareness—of way-making—that can only be sustained with indefatigable resolution.

Indeed, it is not an easy business to stay focused. Even though the *Daodejing*'s teachings on how to cultivate the most effective disposition for making one's way in the world could not be put in more straightforward terms, still "when the very best scholars learn of way-making they are just barely able to keep to its center" (chapter 41).

Were we to search for something like a central insight that defines the Daoist sensibility, we might discover that a "single thread"

pervades the text. The central focus of the Daoist way of thinking is the decisive role of deference in the establishment and preservation of relationships. As we have said above, integrity in a processual worldview is not *being one*, but *becoming one* in the consummatory relationships that one is able to achieve within a context of environing particulars. Deference involves a yielding (and being yielded to) grounded in an acknowledgment of the shared excellence of particular foci (*de*) in the process of one's own self-cultivation. Deferential acts require that one put oneself literally in the place of the other, and in so doing, incorporate what was the object of deference into what is one's own developing disposition. And one's own disposition thus fortified becomes available as a locus of deference for others.

In Confucianism, self is determined by sustained effort (*zhong* 忠) in deferential transactions (*shu* 恕) guided by ritually structured roles and relations (*li* 禮) that project one's person outward into society and into culture. Such a person becomes a focus of the community's deference (*junzi* 君子) and a source of its spirituality (*shen* 神).

Daoism, on the other hand, expresses its deferential activity through what we are calling the *wu*-forms. The three most familiar articulations of this pervasive sensibility are: *wuwei* 無爲, *wuzhi* 無知, and *wuyu* 無欲. These are, respectively, noncoercive actions in accordance with the *de* ("particular focus") of things; a sort of knowing without resort to rules or principles; and desiring which does not seek to possess or control its "object." In each of these instances, as in the case of Confucian *shu*, it is necessary to put oneself in the place of what is to be acted in accordance with, what is to be known, or what is to be desired, and thus incorporate this perspective into one's own disposition. Our chief aim here is to demonstrate how this explicitly Daoist understanding of deferential activity presupposes a focus-field model of self.

Given our discussion of the inseparability of feeling and thinking—the affective and the cognitive—in the Daoist heart-and-mind (*xin*), the conflict associated with the self that the Daoist sage must overcome cannot be a struggle among some compartmentalized

rational, appetitive, and emotional faculties. Indeed, given the relational and unpartitioned model of the self characterized by *xin*, it is difficult to imagine how there could be anything like an internal dynamics that would be a source of agitation. It is unlikely that we would find Hamlets or St. Pauls prominent among the Daoists.

If the problematic of unrealized selfhood does not entail a self divided against itself, what is the source and the nature of the disturbance that the cultivation of the Daoist disposition is meant to overcome? If it is not referenced primarily within an individuating soul, it can only be a disturbance in the relationships that constitute the context of self-consummation. Said another way, if a person is not in fact constituted by some essential, partitioned "soul," but is rather seen as dynamic pattern of personal, social, and natural relationships, agitation must arise as a consequence of poor management of these constitutive roles and relationships. Hence, agitation in the heart-and-mind is not narrowly "psychological," but is more accurately conceived of as of broad ethical concern: How should we act and what should we do?

To summarize the three most prominent examples of the *wu*-forms that we have discussed in more detail elsewhere,[20] *wuwei* 無爲, often translated (unfortunately) as "no action" or "non-action," really involves the absence of any course of action that interferes with the particular focus (*de* 德) of those things contained within one's field of influence. Actions uncompromised by stored knowledge or ingrained habits are relatively unmediated: they are accommodating and spontaneous. As such, these actions are the result of deferential responses to the item or the event in accordance with which, or in relation to which, one is acting. These actions are *ziran* 自然, "spontaneous" and "self-so-ing," and as such, are nonassertive actions.

It is not through an internal struggle of reason against the passions but through "acuity (*ming* 明)"—a mirroring of the things of the world as they are in their interdependent relations with us—that we reach a state in which nothing among all of the myriad of "the goings on" in the world will be able to agitate our hearts-and-minds, and we are able to promote the flourishing of our world. In

other words, we defer in attaining integrity with those things that contextualize us, establishing a frictionless equilibrium with them. And it is this state of achieved equilibrium that is precisely the relationship most conducive to symbiotic growth and productivity. The Daoist sages in *Zhuangzi* are described in such terms:

> The stillness of the sages is not simply a matter of their saying: "Stillness is good!" and hence they are still. Rather, they are still because none of the myriad things are able to agitate their hearts-and-mind. When water is still, it illuminates one's whiskers and eyebrows, and in its placidity, it provides a standard so that skilled artisans can take their measure from it. If the stillness of water provides illumination, how much more so one's spirit. The stillness of the heart-and-mind of the sage makes it mirror to the whole world and the looking glass for all of the myriad things. [21]

The notion of *jing* 靜—stillness, tranquillity—that is often used to characterize this posture, far from being simple passivity, is an ongoing, dynamic achievement of equilibrium that requires constant monitoring and adjustment. It is important to remember that all correlative pairs entail their opposites in the sense that *jing* is "tranquillity-becoming-agitated." Thus, tranquillity (*jing*) stands in a dominant relationship in its partnership with agitation (*dong* 動); it does not negate or exclude its opposite. The same qualification has to be brought to bear on other familiar pairs that might otherwise mislead us: for example, emptiness (*xu* 虛) and fullness (*shi* 實), and clarity (*qing* 清) and turbidity (*zhuo* 濁).

Wuzhi 無知, often translated as "no-knowledge," actually means the absence of a certain kind of knowledge—the kind of knowledge that is dependent upon ontological presence: that is, the assumption that there is some unchanging reality behind appearance. Knowledge grounded in a denial of ontological presence involves "acosmotic" thinking: the type of thinking that does not presuppose a single-ordered ("One behind the many") world, and its intellectual accoutrements. It is, therefore, *unprincipled* knowing. Such knowing does not appeal to rules or principles determining the existence, the meaning, or the activity of a

phenomenon. *Wuzhi* provides one with a sense of the *de* of a thing—its particular uniqueness and focus—rather than yielding an understanding of that thing in relation to some concept or natural kind or universal. Ultimately, *wuzhi* is a grasp of the *daode* 道德 relationship of each encountered item that permits an understanding of *this* particular focus (*de*) and the field that it construes.

Knowledge, as unprincipled knowing, is the acceptance of the world on its own terms without recourse to rules of discrimination that separate one sort of thing from another. Rules of thumb, habits of mind and action, established customs, fixed standards, received methods, stipulated concepts and categories, commandments, principles, laws of nature, conventions—all of these prejudices require us to intervene and "welcome things as they come and escort them as they go," resulting in what Steve Goldberg has described as "a hardening of the categories." Having stored past experience and organized it in terms of fixed standards or principles, we then recall, anticipate, and participate in a world patterned by these discriminations.

Sages, however, mirror the world, and "neither see things off nor go out to meet them." As such, they "respond to everything without storing anything up." They mirror the world *at each moment* in a way that is undetermined by the shape of a world that has passed away, or by anticipations of a world yet to come. As the *Daodejing* asks in chapter 10:

> In scrubbing and cleansing your profound mirror
> Are you able to rid it of all imperfections?
> In loving the common people and breathing life into the state,
> Are you able to do it without recourse to wisdom?
> With nature's gates swinging open and closed
> Are you able to remain the female?
> With your insight penetrating the four quarters
> Are you able to do it without recourse to wisdom?

The Daoist project is neither passive nor quietistic. Water is the source of nourishment; the mirror is a source of light; the heart-and-mind is a source of transformative energy. To "know" as the

mirror "knows" is not reduplicative, but is to cast the world in a certain light. Such performative "knowing" is for one to actively interpret and realize a world with healthy, productive effect. These metaphors for *xin* entail a presentation rather than a representation, a coordination rather than a correspondence. "Mirroring" then is best seen as synergistic and responsive, where all of the elements are in the stream and constitute a fluid interdependent continuity.

Perhaps the best rendering of the term *wuyu* 無欲 is "objectless desire." Since neither noncoercive action nor unprincipled knowing can in the strict sense *objectify* a world or any element in it—that is, make discrete and independent objects out of one's environing experience—the desiring associated with the Daoist sensibility is in the strictest sense "objectless." The "enjoyments" associated with *wuyu* are possible without the need to define, possess, or control the occasion of one's enjoyment.

Thus, *wuyu*, rather than involving the cessation and absence of desire, represents the achievement of *deferential desire*. Desire, based upon a noncoercive relationship (*wuwei*) with the world and a "mirroring" understanding (*wuzhi*) of it, is shaped not by the desire to own, to control, or to consume, but by the desire simply to celebrate and to enjoy. It is deference. Desire is directed at those things desirable because they *stand to be desired*. But those things which stand to be desired must themselves be deferential, which means that they cannot *demand* to be desired. For to demand to be desired is to exercise a kind of mesmerizing control over the desirer. In a world of events and processes in which discriminations are recognized as conventional and transient, desire is predicated upon one's ability at any given moment to "let go." It is in this sense that *wuyu* is a nonconstruing, objectless, desire.

The Daoist problem with desire does not concern what is desired, but rather the manner of the desiring. Enjoyment for the Daoist is realized not in spite of the fact that one might lose what is desired, but because of this fact. The world is a complex set of transformative processes, never at rest. *Wuhua* 物化, the metamorphosis of things (and not to be confused with the *wu*-forms), means that we can never pretend that what we seek to hold on to has any perma-

nent status. In Daoism, transient desire is the only desire that lets things be, that does not construe the world in a certain manner, that does not seek to apply the brakes on a world of changing things.

The key to an understanding of *wuyu*—indeed of all these *wu*-forms that comprise the Daoist disposition—lies in the contrast between "objects" and "objectivity." Using Western epistemological terms, the thoughts about the world expressed in both the *Zhuangzi* and the *Daodejing* represent what we might call a realist perspective.[22] Beyond the mediating confusions introduced by language, and by layers of our own distorted perceptions and tendentious categorizations, there is nevertheless, with properly Daoist qualifications, an "objectively" real world. Our task is to experience that world as "objectively" as possible.

From the Daoist perspective, the problem begins when we insist that the "objective world" is a world made up of objects—namely, concrete, unchangeable things that we encounter as over against and independent of us; things which announce themselves to us by asserting "I object!" For the Daoist, the objective world cannot be objective in this sense because it is a constantly transforming flow of events or processes that belie the sorts of discriminations that would permit a final inventory of the furniture of the world.

Paradoxically, for the Daoist the objective world is objectless. Sages envision a world of changing events that they can, for whatever reason, choose to freeze momentarily into a distinct pattern of discrimination, but that they recognize, when they see clearly, as being beyond such distinctions.

For the Daoist, the consequence of this transformed vision is that knowing, acting, and desiring in the world are no longer based upon construal. Feeling ourselves in tension with objectified others can lead us to act in an aggressive or defensive manner in order to effect our will. Principles and fixed standards can lead us to construe the object of our knowledge by recourse to such principles. In this way, an item becomes one of a *kind* (rather than *one-of-a-kind*) or an instrument for the achievement of an end (as opposed to an end in itself). Desire motivated by an object of desire leads us

to seek possession of that which is desired, allowing it significance only insofar as it meets our needs. A self that is consumed by objects of desire narrows, truncates, and obfuscates the world as it is.

On the other hand, noncoercive action, unprincipled knowing, and objectless desire have the following in common: To the extent that a disposition defined in these terms is efficacious, it enriches the world by allowing the process to unfold spontaneously on its own terms, while at the same time participating fully in it. We may say that the implementation of the *wu*-forms allows us to leave the world as it is. But we may make this claim only if we recognize that "world" in this context means a myriad of spontaneous transactions that are characterized by emerging patterns of deference to acknowledged excellences. In Daoism the self is forgotten to the extent that discriminated objects no longer constitute the environs of the self.

These three *wu*-forms—*wuwei, wuzhi, wuyu*—all provide a way of entertaining, of deferring to, and of investing oneself in an objectless world. Thus, in their governing of the people the sages are concerned with embodying and promoting the sort of acting, knowing, and desiring that does not depend upon objects. In fact, when these *wu*-forms are understood as the optimum dispositions of the Daoist self, whether in the person of the sage or the people, they provide us with a way of interpreting passages in the *Daodejing* that are frequently construed unsympathetically as recommending imposition and control. Chapter 3 is an example:

> Not promoting those of superior character
> Will save the common people from becoming contentious.
> Not prizing property that is hard to come by
> Will save them from becoming thieves.
> Not making a show of what might be desired
> Will save them from becoming disgruntled.
>
> It is for this reason that in the proper governing by the sages:
> They empty the hearts-and-minds of the people and fill their stomachs,
> They weaken their aspirations and strengthen their bones,

Ever teaching the common people to be unprincipled in their knowing
And objectless in their desires.
They keep the hawkers of knowledge at bay.
It is simply in doing things noncoercively
That everything is governed properly.

But the *wu*-forms are not just *wuwei*, *wuzhi*, and *wuyu*. In fact, *wu*-forms are pervasive in the *Daodejing*. One additional *wu*-form, for example, is *wuming* 無名: translated as "the nameless," but actually suggesting a kind of naming that does not assign fixed reference to things.

In order to function effectively in negotiating our environment, we need to rely upon our ability to make distinctions. These distinctions in themselves are certainly functional and enabling, but can distort the way in which we understand our world. We can easily fall into the fallacy of what Whitehead describes as "misplaced concreteness," reifying what is abstract and treating these hypostatized "things" as more real than the changing events of our experience. We can easily and at real expense overdetermine the continuity within the life process as some underlying and unchanging foundation. Such linguistic habits can institutionalize and enforce an overly static vision of the world, and in so doing, deprive both language and life of their creative possibilities. The referential use of language as someone's technical morality—expressing the way the world *ought* to be—can too easily lay claim to the power and control that would make it so.

Naming as power undermines the importantly creative aspect in the effective use of names. In a processal world—a world ever under construction—to be able to name something is to be able to trace out its concrete relation to you and the world, and on that basis, respond to it productively. While naming can be understood as an abstractive and isolating gesture, Daoist naming personalizes a relationship and, abjuring any temptation to fix what is referenced, instead understands the name as a shared ground of growing intimacy. Such naming is presentational rather than just representational, normative rather than just descriptive, perlocutionary rather

than just locutionary, a doing and a knowing rather than just a saying.

Naming as knowing must have the provisionality to accommodate engaged relationships as in their "doing and undergoing" they deepen and become increasingly robust. Such knowing is dependent upon an awareness of the indeterminate aspects of things. The ongoing shaping of experience requires a degree of imagination and creative projection that does not reference the world as it is, but anticipates what it might become.

In the *Classic of Mountain and Seas*, an ancient "gazetteer" that takes its reader on a field seminar through unfamiliar lands, the calls of the curious animals and birds that are encountered are in fact their own names. They (like most things) cry out what they would be. And having access to the "name" of something is not only a claim to knowing it in a cognitive sense, but more importantly, to knowing how to deal with it. Naming is most importantly the responsiveness that attends familiarity. Hence such knowing is a feeling and a doing: it is value-added. It is naming without the kind of fixed reference that allows one to "master" something, a naming that does not arrest or control. It is a discriminating naming that in fact appreciates rather than depreciates a situation.

Another important *wu*-form is *wuxin* 無心, literally "no heart-and-mind," that might best be interpreted as "unmediated thinking and feeling." As the *Daodejing* observes in chapter 49:

> Sages really think and feel immediately (*wuxin*).
> They take the thoughts and feelings of the common people as their own.

The sages do not compose the score for social and political order. The music is the natural expression of the common people. The role of the sages is to listen carefully to the songs of the common people and to orchestrate their thoughts and feelings into consummate harmony. Since the people themselves are the immediate source of communal order, they are in this respect the emerging content of the hearts-and-minds of the sages. The heart-and-mind is the product rather than the source of the flourishing community. The people

do not speak to one another because they have hearts-and-minds; rather, they have *become* whole-hearted members of the community through full participation in the communicating community.

An obscure passage in the *Zhuangzi* becomes less so when we read it and its key notion *wuqing* 無情 as a *wu*-form—not "no-feeling," but rather "unmediated feeling." This understanding of *wuqing* can provide us with a useful gloss on this chapter 49 of the *Daodejing*.

> Hui Shi said to Zhuangzi, "Can someone be a person without feelings?"
>
> "Not a problem," replied Zhuangzi.
>
> "But how can someone be called a person," asked Hui Shi, "if they don't have feelings?"
>
> Zhuangzi said, "Their context provides them with the appearance and the shape of a person—why wouldn't we call them such?"
>
> "Since we are already calling them persons," asked Hui Shi, "how could it be that they are lacking feelings?"
>
> "This is not what I mean by feelings," replied Zhuangzi. "What I mean when I say that they are '*wuqing*' (lit. 'without feelings') is that they do not injure their own persons with likes and dislikes, and are always responsive to what is natural without trying to increase life."[23]

Persons such William James's "Jack and Jill" reside in their immediate affective relationships. For such persons to lose sight of these important relations by buying into a regimen of contrived values distances them from their concrete circumstances and makes them less human than they were.

Another *wu*-form that we find repeated in the *Daodejing* is *wushi* 無事, interpreted as "no-business." As a *wu*-form it means "to be non-interfering in going about your business." In chapter 57, it has a specifically political application that explains itself:

> The more prohibitions and taboos there are in the world,
> The poorer the people will be.
> The more sharp instruments in the hands of the common people,
> The darker the days for the state,
> The more wisdom hawked among the people,

The more that perverse things will proliferate.
The more prominently the laws and statutes are displayed,
The more widespread will be the brigands and thieves.

Hence in the words of the sages:
We do things noncoercively
And the common people develop along their own lines;
We cherish equilibrium
And the common people order themselves;
We are non-interfering in our governance
And the common people prosper themselves;
We are objectless in our desires
And the common people are of themselves like unworked wood.

One of the most pervasive ideas in the *Daodejing* that is captured in the *wu*-form *wuzheng* 無爭 is "striving without contentiousness." Chapter 66 concludes with a consideration of the conduct of the sages: "Is it not because they strive without contentiousness that no one in the world is able to contend with them?"

The *wu*-forms that we find throughout the text all advocate a personal disposition that seeks to optimize relationships through collaborative actions that, in the absence of coercion, enable one to make the most of any situation. It is the uniqueness of each situation that requires any generalization about this optimal disposition to be stated in negative terms. A voice coach can describe the constraints that students in general might have to overcome in achieving the fullness of their talent, but all of the students must sing their own unique songs.

9. THE *WU*-FORMS AS "HABIT-FORMING"

If we look for a more concrete way to express the cultivation of the *wu*-form disposition advocated by the *Daodejing*, we might think of "life as art." The developed customs and habits of mind of the Daoist are a resource that conditions, influences, and attempts to optimize the range of creative possibilities without in fact causally determining the crafting of novel experiences. Such aggregated habits are irreducibly social, and are the unannounced social propensity

out of which individual hearts-and-minds express themselves as overt actions.

For example, the insistent particularity associated with the uniqueness of a particular person must be understood both relationally and as a dynamic process within the context of a given natural, social, and cultural world. Particular character is an interpenetration of habits that has organized and made meaningful the more primary but not more important natural impulses. Considered synchronically, persons are irreducibly relational, entailing what they do for this specific community as well as the personal enrichment they derive from participating in its communal life-forms and culture. Viewed diachronically, each particular personality must also be understood as an ongoing and unrelenting awareness that attends every gesture and thought, and that is expressed as a refined disposition in all of its activities.

For the classical Confucian, this ritualized awareness (*li* 禮)—the living of one's life within the roles and relationships of family and community—focuses one's aggregated habits as they are expressed in the events of the day. We have reflected on this Confucian notion of disposition at some length in our *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the* Zhongyong, and attempt to locate the Daoist sensibility within this discussion here.

To begin with, for the Daoist, this focused awareness is extended beyond the immediate human community to encompass the other environments as well. The habit-informed interactions between person and environments occur within custom and culture broadly construed. This ecological sensibility is what gives Daoist philosophy its profoundly cosmic dimension.

To use the word "habits" to characterize either the Confucian *li* or the Daoist ecological sensibility might seem, initially, somewhat disenchanting, reducing the intense and elegantly productive human experience, whether human-centered or more broadly construed, to the ordinary and routine. But the claim at issue is that it is precisely in the elevation of the routine and ordinary business of the day, rather than in some ephemeral and transitory "mo-

mentous" events, that the profound meanings of a life are to be realized. And, properly understood, "habit" is essential to this process of enchanting the everyday.

We are accustomed to think of habit in a negative manner as mere routine, or as compulsively repetitive behavior that we would alter if only we had the willpower. That is, we are inclined to place habit squarely within the sphere of determined behavior. Indeed, habit as acquired disposition is of no great significance if one understands the order of the world to be the result of a transcendent Creator, or as the mechanical instancing of transcendent Laws of Nature. For in such cases, habitual actions merely replicate the necessities of things; they are the involuntary expression of our given instincts and needs.

It is only if the world is truly processive and changing in character that acquired dispositions may become a constitutive ground of the way things are. Understanding the Daoist-refined ecological consciousness as habitual behavior will be of benefit only if we rethink our own accepted senses of habit.

Hexis was used initially by Aristotle as a neologism. The Greek *hexus* means "having" or "being in possession of." Early on, *hexis* also had the suggestion of both "condition" and the "state" of something. It was thus used dispositionally to mean the natural or conditioned "tendencies" of things—as the "habit" of a vine. Aristotle himself sometimes uses *hexis* to refer to the natural or innate behavior of creatures. If we combine the senses of "habit" as that which is *had*—as a *state* or *condition* that something takes on, and as its consequent *tendency*—we arrive at the sense of the term that is found most prominently in the American pragmatic tradition.

John Dewey contrasts habit with essentialized notions of human nature and reason that are the backdrop of deterministic instinct theory, insisting that "the *meaning* of native activities is not native; it is acquired."[24] We are our habits, and they possess us rather than we them. So for Dewey, "the real opposition is not between reason and habit but between routine, unintelligent habit, and intelligent habit or art."[25] Habit is an acquired and cultivated

disposition to act in one way as opposed to another. It is the significant form that bursts of energy take as they are channeled through existing patterns of associated living, dependent upon anticipated response as much as novel impulse.

It is certainly not counterintuitive to understand habit in this creative sense. Most individuals would recognize the peculiar contribution of technique to artistic endeavor. Without the ability to mentally parse and physically play musical notes and chords in a stylized fashion, neither composition nor performance would be possible. Technique, as pre-reflective and dispositional, frees the artist to perform and to create. This same relationship to spontaneity is realized throughout one's experience.

The immediacy of the aesthetic experience—that is, its *unmediated* character—does not permit of the development of rules or procedures defining how to either create or experience novelties. What is permitted is the construal of the conditions under which an unmediated experience may be provoked, varied, nuanced, and continually transformed. Habits are the acquired structures that make possible the experience of the *immediate*. Informed by good habits, what *feels* good *is* good. Although habits are the background of spontaneous, creative actions, the disposition that these habits constitute is underdetermined in the sense that it is constantly being reshaped and redirected by these novel interactions.

In the Chinese world, things do not *have* habits, they *are* habits. Habit is a mode of being. Thus habitual behavior establishes a relationship between "having" and "being" that encapsulates the manner in which the aesthetic sensibility dominates classical Chinese society. Scholars of Chinese thought, for example, have persistently noted that the Chinese lack a copulative sense of "to be" as "to exist." Rather, *you* 有 in doing the work of the copula means "to have," "to be present." The distinction between the copulative sense of being as *existing* and the Chinese sense of being (*you*) as *having* amounts to a difference between two modes of being present—the mediated and the relatively immediate.

Mediated experience entails the fact that Being, in the mode of this or that *essence*, is made manifest through the particular beings

of the world. Persons are actualizations of some prior endowment or potential. Such experience is characteristic of substantialist ontologies and cosmologies that regard substance and form as fundamental, and that understand experience as being governed by a strong teleological design. Substances are known through forms or concepts that either exist prior to the substances themselves, or are abstractable from them. These forms are the evidence of a given design.

Immediate experience requires that the concrete particulars themselves are the objects of knowledge. Such particulars are not mediated but are grasped immediately in the sense that the experience of them is simply *had*. The structures that permit the having of experience and that determine its significance are the cultivated habits that dispose one toward that experience. The language of taste and of appreciation is relevant.

The notion of Being that implies a contrast between essence and existence privileges mediation and, therefore, conceptual, generic, and *essential* knowledge. An aesthetic perspective, as opposed to a rational or logical one, involves experiencing the world in a relatively *unmediated* fashion. Mediated experience requires one to grasp or comprehend the *essence* of a thing, while the unmediated aesthetic experience is simply *had* as lived experience.

A comparison with the analytical epistemic language of "getting," "grasping," "comprehending" is important here. Rather than a language of mediation in which the *essences* of things are abstracted through concepts, the Chinese language tends to be dispositional in that it promotes the "having" of the unmediated experience through a correlating and focusing of the affairs of the day. The important contrast here is between a cognitive and discursive knowing that abstracts from experience and felt experience as the concrete content of knowledge.

While the Confucian focus is on the cultivated disposition that allows for unmediated ritualized expression, we have registered the Daoist concern that too much emphasis on such cultivation will produce precisely the opposite undesired effect of overwhelming the spontaneous natural disposition with artificial human constructs.

That is, the Daoist would look to the cadence of nature as a resource for educating and refining our natural sensibilities. In the Daoist critique of Confucianism, it is assumed that *li* has ossified into a technical morality that, far from facilitating unmediated expression, dislocates the human community from its natural rhythms. As such, generic, institutionalized *li* now *mediates* behavior, and in so doing, suppresses spontaneous natural habits. Both the Confucian and the Daoist recognize the need for a cultivated disposition as the ground of felt experience; they simply disagree on how such a disposition is to be achieved and sustained.

NOTES TO THE *PHILOSOPHICAL INTRODUCTION*

1. Tang Junyi (1988):8.
2. Carus and Suzuki (1913):18–9.
3. For both Plato and early Aristotle, *kosmos* was the "visible God" (*horatos theos*).
4. See Hall and Ames (1995):chapter 2 *passim* for the development of this terminology.
5. See *Zhuangzi* 5.2.40 and commentary on it in 63.23.58; compare Graham (1981):54 and 104, and Watson (1968):41 and 257.
6. *Mencius* 2A2.
7. *Mencius* 7A4.
8. See Hall (1987) and (1994), and Hall and Ames (1998):39–43, 111–12.
9. See Ames and Hall (2001):38–53.
10. See King (1985).
11. Hall and Ames (1998):35–7.
12. See the WB and GD versions of chapter 37.
13. James (2000): 286–87.
14. While *qing* 青 is certainly a phonetic element, the semantic reference is not irrelevant. *Qing* means "green-blue" as a color associated with luxuriant foliage, an indeterminate field of vegetation and undergrowth.
15. Whitehead (1926):67.
16. Tang Junyi (1988):13.
17. See Whitehead (1978):110–15. See also Neville (1974):10 ff. and Grange (1997):51–60 for useful applications of this vocabulary.

18. See *Analects* 18:5–7, and Hall and Ames (1998):171–80.

19. See Ames (forthcoming) for a contrast between Daoism and Confucianism on the issue of human exceptionalism.

20. See Hall and Ames (1998):45–58.

21. See *Zhuangzi* 33.13.2. Compare Graham (1981):259 and Watson (1968):142.

22. Thus, with some qualifications, we agree with Angus Graham (1989):194 in his claim that Zhuangzi "accepts without question that we have to take the world as it is. . . ."

23. *Zhuangzi* 14.5.54. Compare Graham (1981):82 and Watson (1968):75–6.

24. Dewey *MW* 14:65.

25. Dewey *MW* 14.55.