

Dao of the New Age

The Selfless Gene

There is nothing so transforming as Heaven;

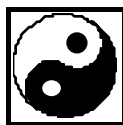
There is nothing so responsive as Earth;

There is nothing so evolving as Humanity.



“The ultimate accomplishment is returning to the original self.”

Liu I-Ming on hexagram 24 ‘Returning’ *The Taoist I Ching* tr. Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1986



The Way of the Integral One

“When they learn the truth contained in these teachings, their hearts may immediately reconnect with the integral nature of the multi-universe. Then the omniscient, omnipresent Integral One, which is the treasure of divine power of the multi-universe, will shine upon them and absorb them into its radiance. They will become submerged in the boundless ocean of blessings and impersonal love of the Integral One...”

Those people will have dissolved their rigid mental concepts of self and others, male and female, longevity and brevity, life and death. Also, they will not have any mental obstructions formed by different cultural backgrounds, customs or religious beliefs which would prevent the perception of the subtle truth of universal integrity... Those who dissolve all concepts of individuality are beings of absolute awareness. By regaining Oneness with the clarity of their minds, they would fulfil the most virtuous merit and attain the highest blessing... If someone in the future embraces this revelation of the integral life without scepticism, conflict or panic, then this person would be very, very unusual...

...if we label integral Oneness as subtle and transcendental, then it ceases to be truly integral. By doing this, we reduce it to the mental sphere of dichotomy where it is no longer the essential, direct and undistorted reflection of universal truth of the oneness of life.”

Hua Hu Ching - The Later Teachings of Lao Tzu,
Hua-Ching Ni, Shambhala Books, 1995



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• ***The New Millennium***

The intention of this work is as part of what I take to be the New Age quest for a valid, believable and inspirational metaphysics.

The Twentieth Century has seen an incredible breakthrough in scientific understanding of the nature of the universe. What is not always so obvious is that there has been a corresponding breakthrough in our spiritual understanding of our own nature, not least because of the global currency of formerly esoteric or locally isolated teachings.

At the root of both these developments is what we might call the New Empiricism — what matters about the world is not what others believe, but what works for you! Just as the scientific certainties of the year 1900 have proved to be so much hot air, so too the cultural certainties. All our assumptions about what we are, our social roles and expectations, the nature of every relationship has been subject to the empirical test of viability — *"Darling, this just isn't working for me."*

This social iconoclasm is a product of technocultural history. We have gained the understanding and have invented the technology that seems to promise the ability for humanity to mould the world to our own design.

In the delight of exercising our technological power to modify our environment, it is as if we have simply turned our backs on any cultural assumptions that might hold us back from enjoyment of our thrilling new ability to twiddle with the world's control knobs.

The danger of freedom of thought is that we think only of ourselves or only of our short-term interests. The prophet of modern macroeconomic management, John Maynard Keynes, explicitly recognised the terrible temptation of modern economics. In recognising that the quest for economic growth involved pushing the Greed button again and again, in open denial of Christian traditions, Keynes acknowledged that, for a time, *"Foul is fair and fair is foul."* The moral question must be subordinated to solution of the economic question. For instance, the existence of a class of very rich is seen as a necessary evil, for they are supposed to constitute the source of investment in increasingly productive technology which would eventually spread the rewards of consumer goods.

Mass production directly requires mass consumption. The manipulation of consumer demand, specifically the manufacture of demand for products that never existed before, has become the mark of the modern economy.

The very information technology (mass media) that the industrial economy requires to ensure that there is a market for what can profitably be produced, has become the vehicle of cultural change.

The most significant historic product of the new media is not technical, but moral. It is the realisation of the global unity of humankind.

In the field of material development, we are beginning to recognise the fundamental ecology constraining the sustainability of economic growth and rising social expectations.

The very scale of industrialisation has pushed the human frontier to the limits of the earth. The rich and poor no longer occupy different worlds, but can see each other as neighbours on one intimately integrated world.

Humanity, in both the personal and political sense, is a moral unity. The intelligent way of taking responsibility for the ecology of our own sustenance is

to be clear as to the implications of our own existence, to define our own purpose. The meaning of humanity must be something that we know for sure so that we are sustained by flexible and enduring wisdom.

Why we are is not something that can be explained to us, it is not even something that we can discover, perhaps it is something we must invent.

What humanity on the brink of an unknown future needs, individually and collectively, is an understanding that we can, literally, make our stand under. The following thoughts represent my groping through the implications of what a better (meaning, a more inclusive, sustainable and sustaining) understanding of our life and purpose might entail.

- ***What is the New Age?***

"Using the measures and regulations of one generation or one age to govern the world is like the case of the traveller in a boat who drops his sword in the middle of the river and notches the edge of the boat to mark where the sword fell; then he goes back to the riverbank that evening to look for his sword below the notch on the boat. He is far from knowing what is what."

The Tao of Politics - Lessons of the Masters of Huainan
tr. Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1990

The New Age Movement is widely seen as a reaction against rationality, as a retreat into Unreason from the tedious certainties of modern science due to some weak-minded atavistic craving for supernatural panaceas.

I think this stereotype underestimates, not only the significance of the diversity of creative development of humane technology that falls under the New Age rubric, but also the nature of rationality itself.

Reason has been sold short but loud by certain esoteric mystery cults masquerading in the mundane disguise of scientists and economists. Explanations of human behaviour in terms of nothing but biochemistry, the action of 'Selfish Genes' and economic determination by market exchange, demean and belittle human dignity.

The legendary Daoist sage Laozi (also transcribed as Lao Tzu or Lao Tse) said *"As for those who would take the world and improve it, I observe that they usually succeed only in making things worse."* (Quotations from Laozi where the particular source is uncited are my own paraphrase of many versions of the Dao De Jing — Tao Te Ching).

Until very recently, such thinking seemed wildly exotic and impractical to Western people who had convinced themselves of their manifest destiny to alter the world as they saw fit. Modernism is the cult of unlimited progress and the arbitrary improbability of the world — "We have the technology, not available before."

The glimmer of a new understanding of ourselves and our true relationship of interdependence with the world has appeared, significantly at the leading edge of scientific discovery.

In quantum physics, in biochemical thermodynamics and in ecological theory, a new organic paradigm is evolving to replace inadequate mechanistic or instrumental models of spiritual as well as material existence.

In the bubble chamber, retort and vivarium of the new alchemists, sophisticated observational technologies are forcing radical re-examination of the deep structures of how we think about life.

Quantum indeterminacy and complementarity, the dissipative structures of complex self-organisation and the intimate integration of ecological systems are coming to our attention just as electronic systems and mass transport — not to mention nuclear accidents — unite the world society as never before.

Modernism has come full circle from its origin in reaction against supernatural mediaevalism. The dangers of a view of the world that sees only the work of blind chance and regards everything as fit only for improvement become ever more apparent.

This also reveals the historic consensus between the supernatural and rational wings of Western thinking — in rejection of the world as it actually is! In the end, the only difference is in the technology available for redemption of the world to better fit our alienated fantasies. (It is not coincidental that the Christian establishment equally anathematises New Age.)

If Barbarism be defined as ignoring and trampling under what you do not understand, then Western thinking has yet to emerge beyond its barbaric origins. Conversely, if intelligence be defined as the ability to learn from your own mistakes, then perhaps we do stand at the dawn of a New Age.

What I take as the New Age movement is the many ways people are coming to recover, discover and invent techniques for the integration of the compelling new perspectives into their everyday human individual and collective preoccupations.

G. I. Gurdjieff taught that the only significant evolution is conscious self-evolution, and this theme of taking responsibility for one's own life is definitive of New Age concerns and techniques. Indeed, it is precisely this aim that is regarded as profoundly heretical by the Christian church, which identifies New Age shamanism with Satanism.

In fact, the supernatural plays a remarkably small role in New Age thought. The New Age is the age of secularised spirituality. It is the confusion of spiritual experience with supernaturalism that deprives many of recognition of their own spiritual life. Equally, collective images and ritualised approaches to religious meaning may blind many to their own innate religious sense. The association of ideas of the Divine Being with earthly forms of authority produces a great many distortions of religious teaching, whose hidden subtext is the power of social control.

New Age is the understanding that it is both possible and necessary to heal the historic division of humanity into exclusive mental, physical, emotional and spiritual functions. It is identical to taking responsibility for one's own self-evolution and requires liberation from denuded and deluded political sloganising.

The New Stone Age marked the beginnings of human dominance of the global ecosystem through the domestication of certain plant and animal species; the new New Age marks the beginnings of sustainable human dominance of the global ecosystem through the domestication of the only species left, humanity ourselves.

• **Seeking the Truth**

"Investigating truth, fulfilling human nature, taking pleasure in the celestial, knowing the meaning of life, cultivating harmony and peace and arranging the social order are all within the realm of those who master change.

Developed people advance in quality, accomplish works, carry out tasks and develop tools to accord with change.

Sages gaze above and examine below, search afar and apprehend the near to accord with what never changes."

The Book of Balance and Harmony of Li DaoQun,
translated by Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1991

Just as every person differs by birth and circumstance, so every seeker of the eternal verities pursues a different journey of return.

Similarly, every theory or description of the true nature of things reflects the human experience and understanding of its possessor as a reasonable explanation of personal reality.

Conversely, each discovery about the fundamental nature of existence should rationally influence our understanding of our own human identity and character. This is the fundamental stuff of collective culture. For instance, mechanical science produced industrial society just as supernaturalism produced mediaeval society.

It is important to realise that the theory that culture is technologically determined — the product of continual progress — is, in fact, particular to the modern age that is now passing into history.

The wheel is turning again, and the danger of regression to supernaturalism or even further to primitive nationalism and tribalism is looming. There is a desperate need for personal meaning which can only be disappointed by the limitation of rationality to replicable demonstrability.

The inherent dialectic of cultural development ensures that the dominant theme of an emergent new age is formed in reaction against the perceived inadequacy of the old ways of thought and behaviour to meet new priorities.

This is akin to the economic truism that value is proportionate to scarcity.

Agronomists look to identify 'the limiting resource' which is the major determinant of ecological productivity.

Hence the apparent paradox that worship of technology declines in cultural concern when technology becomes sufficiently sophisticated and pervasive. *Pace* Marshall McLuhan, the medium as its own message quickly loses its initial numinous fascination.

When you are poor, 'making your living' is a constant preoccupation; when you become richer, you begin to consider 'what to make of your life.' The poor aspire to be richer. What do the rich aspire to?

Science which offers only generalities or genetic engineering is as offensive to human dignity as abasement to arbitrary supernatural idols. Stoic atheism is just one more deviated religious cult which stultifies the spiritual growth of its adherents, like all the others.

What industrialism inherited from mediaevalism was the model of authority, the concept of hierarchical regulation of the unschooled many by the knowledgeable few.

If the baton of 'someone who knows better' has been passed from the priest to the expert, the implication of esoteric qualification and vision beyond the grasp of the ordinary citizen remains as the mark of legitimacy to control and direct collective action.

This reduces human intelligence to conformity and obedience to established authority with potentially disastrous consequences. Laozi said *"Have done with learning; sack the professors [for they only get the people in a muddle]. When vision is no longer bound by doctrine, the people will see what needs doing."*

There is a parallel here with the Anarchist principle that any attempt to impose social order only degrades the natural order of mutual aid. The holarchic principle of self-organisation is now being recognised in each of the leading edge sciences of the late 20th Century - quantum physics, biochemistry and ecology.

The same principle of emergent self-organisation applied to individual and group human development is the wellspring of the New Age movement. At root, this is the recognition and celebration of the validity of the feeling responses to life and the acknowledgement that feelings have a logic of their own which needs to be addressed on its own terms. Rather than a retreat from reason, this involves expanding the boundaries of personal and cultural rationality and taking responsibility for emotional values.

Carl Gustav Jung's much misunderstood principle of Synchronicity in fact refers to this necessary mutuality of feelings with material facts and events. In the most banal terms, we may explain coincidences as the result of our selectively noticing and remembering events which have an emotional impact on our personal concerns and discarding those which do not move us in the same way.

Jung goes one step further and suggests that we may indeed be receiving messages, even guidance, from our higher selves in the chains of significant events that seem to direct our lives. This is precisely the meaning of the Chinese word, 'Dao' (literally, 'the Way', sometimes transcribed as Tao, pronounced dow) : *"Though you have no teacher, yet you may learn by applying yourself to the changes."* (Yi Jing)

No supernatural intervention is necessary, for nature is superior to our conceptions. This nature is integral, One, immanent and transcendent, multi-dimensional and holistic. Each person belongs to life, is the Dao in action.

• **Complete Reality**

"What others teach, I teach also."

Laozi

The Daoist teaching is of endless evolutionary renewal in the plenitude of the Integral One of all being, the emptiness of non-being.

This is known as Complete Reality, for nothing stands outside this Integrity — no material object, no mental construct, no spiritual incarnation.

Those who have attained insight into the oneness of existence and practise its realisation in their own lives are entitled to be described as True Humans.

The True Human is the personification of Reality. This is more than an ecological niche, it is the Compassionate Identity of all beings brought to exquisite personhood in a holy individual.

Nor should the holiness of a realised human be thought of as something bestowed from outside, rather it is the organic product from the uprising well of the essential sacredness of integral existence.

As a natural phenomenon, the expression of this humane aptitude is not immune from the evolutionary impetus of environmental selection. However, the sustaining thread of spiritual realisation is a constant, irregardless of the formatory accidents shaping a particular expression.

There are many paths on the journey to the knowledge of the true nature of life, but only one point-like source and only one sphere-like goal.

Considerations of biological species, social culture and personal happenstance are relevant to the development of the capacity for sagehood, but do not determine its product — which is pure compassion in action.

"Mythology opens up the world so that it becomes transparent to something that is beyond words — in short, what we call transcendence..."

The first function of mythology, then, is to function by showing everything as a metaphor to transcendence. The first field that has to be transcendentalised this way is the field of the environment that we're in, the world that we live in. So that we can see the whole world as opening to a dimension of wonder and mystery.

Every object in the world speaks of this mystery, the mystery of life, and consciousness pours in through the various bodies and beings round about. It must then show you, yourself, that you are similarly transparent to transcendence.

And finally, in a mythologically organised society, all of the rituals are organised in such a way that they help you to experience yourself, the world and the social order of which you are a part, in this mystical way...

The mystical function is opening the transcendence, opening the heart and mind, pointing out that the ultimate mystery that we all try to solve lies beyond the range of human thought or naming."

Joseph Campbell 'The Hero's Journey', Harper and Row, 1987

The word mystic derives from a Greek root meaning 'to close the eyes'. It means to see, as it were, with the inward-looking eye. This is the only way to experience the meaning of life as an accessible living reality rather than as some rationalised concoction of conjecture and projection.

The way of the mystic is to base one's conscious sense of purpose on the undivided integrity of the whole. It is as if consciousness can transcend its biological orientation towards relationships of cause and effect (instrumental meaning) in a more inclusive realisation of identity (participative meaning).

Consciousness is shaped but not limited by biological constraints — the species to which one belongs. Indeed, the very nature of consciousness is the intersection of perception of what is with conception of what might be.

This is essentially a moral function, the acceptance of responsibility for the exercise of freedom of choice in the affirmation of mutuality of interest.

To understand is to be answerable for what one knows and for how intelligently one applies that knowledge in one's everyday behaviour.

• *The Nature of Existence*

As Gregory Bateson has pointed out, an explanation is necessarily tautological — given certain assumptions, it follows that these assumptions are self-evident, so it is neither necessary nor possible to enquire further.

Any coherent rationalisation of the nature of existence, whether materialist or supernaturalist in its tautology, reduces the infinite to the merely big.

The big picture is a picture or image — something that can be grasped and conceived, whereas reality is essentially inexhaustible and ineffable to its component. If this were not so, then the belief would be truer than the believer, which is clearly absurd. Both religion and science reduce to the faith that, whereas I do not know, nevertheless others more inspired or erudite than I do know, and I believe what they say. There can be no verifiable evidence, only acceptance of relationships of power and submission in such a conception of truth.

The supernatural is a human function, not vice-versa. Materialism is subject to the same inversion of appearance over substance. The danger is that our own experience becomes tangled up in the net of thought we make to catch the world.

Low-grade science is as pernicious as low-grade magic, and for the same reasons. Any fixed set of ideas reduces the set of events we are capable of, or rather interested in, responding to by circumscribing our environment of affect.

It is never correct to address a particular in terms of a theory. The most convinced behaviourist or genetic determinist behaves as if he, and those with whom he converses, possess free will rather than being mere DNA-driven phenotypes! It is actually stupid to limit your reactions in terms of your preconceived expectations because it cannot generate new insight and fosters a pernicious blindness to what is actually in front of your eyes or rising in your heart.

• *Categorical Thinking*

The whole mind set of Western thought, whether about physics or metaphysics, has been based on the Aristotelian law of the excluded middle. This is the very keystone of the categorical thinking, underlying both theology and modern rationalism. Its logical form is Either A Or B, in all cases where B = Not A. Rationally, something is either present or absent, so if something is present then it is not absent. For any given category or attribute it is possible either to exclude or include a given entity.

Starting from this point, a hierarchical network of categories is constructed based on a decision tree e.g. male or female; human or animal; sexual or asexual; living or inert; dark or glowing etc. More complex classification can be built up by applying these taxonomic rules. What may not be obvious is that this kind of mental construct does not so much map the world as it delineates the concerns of its producer, the mind itself.

The import of Gödel's theorem is that no conceivable set of sets can include itself as a member. Mind is necessarily a component of intelligence, but not all intelligence is in the mind.

By purporting to describe reality as it actually is, the reductionist tradition of reasoning reduces truth to the level of properly understood and classified facts. By further emphasising the criterion of replicability, modern science excludes altogether from the realm of reason anything which is not externally measurable. Appearance is all, and the only function of scientific theory is to define the variables which must be constrained so as to produce consistent output.

In the most sophisticated mathematical thinking, the whole concept of scientific laws is seen as archaic. Rather, every frame (object, event or environment) constitutes a constrained domain of multi-dimensional 'phase space'.

Ironically, this most abstract view of existence leads directly to the question of the so-called anthropic principle — how is it that the imponderable givens (everything from the mass of the Sun through the geometry of water to the value of the ratio of the circumference of a circle to its diameter) seem to conspire to constrain the evolution of life to just those domains inhabitable by oxygen breathing brain bearers?

The truth is that the abstract phase space maps the human mind and thus only fragmentarily the universal reality as it entirely is.

This is not to deny the value and significance of the human pretension to objectivity. At root, this is an expression of the gift for transcendence — to be made in the image of God. If God represents the totality of intelligence, then humanity represents the particularity of consciousness and, necessarily, of moral conscience, which is to become aware of the consequences of one's actions on the world at large and to modify one's behaviour accordingly.

To be human is to be subject to biological, chemical, topographical and ecological constraint. To aspire to humanity is to discover the responsibility of freedom. Freedom is the conjunction of detachment with participation. As such, it has to be won by acceptance of responsibility and empowerment of inclusive mutuality. The development of mind is identical to the development of moral integrity,

Spiritual growth involves liberation of the inner potential of divinity which is redemption in the holy spirit in every guise. Information is the intersection of data with purpose. We create our world by the meaning we make of it. This cannot but be rooted in understanding of the limits of subjectivity through cultivation of integrated objectivity.

As humans, we know what we have to do by doing it. If we are pre-programmed, we were not supplied with functional requirement specification, nor the source code, nor even a user manual. We're something new, don't quite know what it is. Which is to say, we are what we decide to be, albeit because something inside makes sure we must. We look for purpose in our environment because we are looking to understand our own purpose.

• **Science**

“Freedom is not a gift that is given to the individual; it is a task of self-transformation and subjective evolution.”

Hua Hu-Ching, *The Later Teachings of Lao Tzu*
tr. Ni, Hua-Ching, Shambhala Books, 1995

It is idiotic to expect objective science to provide answers to questions about the meaning, purpose or morality of life.

At best, science can be seen as, itself, a moral endeavour, an acceptance of responsibility for the world in which we live.

Science is a cultural adaptation to enable greater efficiency and effectiveness in the achievement of human purpose. This is not to define the practice of scientific method as morally neutral or value-free, far from it.

The cardinal precepts of science are identical to the roots of all morality — you must address reality as it actually is, and you must understand that everything is connected to everything else.

It was the genius of Athens to produce expositors of the respective principles in Aristotle and Plato (and too much our tragedy that we feel we have to choose one and reject the other).

Simplistically, in the Aristotelian view, we derive the ideas and concepts that we hold from our experience of the objective world; in the Platonic view, it is ideas that are eternal and that shape and determine our experience of the world.

In Jungian terms, these points of view might be taken as exemplifying the difference between a worldly oriented (extravert) and an inwardly directed (introvert) psychological tendency. The distinction itself may be one symptom of a culture caught between two ways of seeing the world — as an experimental test-bed or as a hallucinatory shadowed cave.

Jung's insight addresses the psychological bias underlying the adoption of a particular intellectual paradigm. The term paradigm, appropriately derived from the Greek meaning 'to show side-by-side', refers to a view of the world, a model, exemplar or outlook that enables perception in depth.

Even before the classical age of Greek philosophy, the gods Apollo and Dionysos exemplified polar ways of apprehending reality — through intellectual order and discipline or through self abandon and surrender to the senses. While the official culture emphasised the Apollonian virtues, in practice social equilibrium required periodical surrender to Dionysian festival.

Over time also, Hellenic culture oscillated between these two poles. During periods of stability and prosperity, citizens were drawn to the sobriety and solemnity of the Apollonian ritual; during insecure times, the mystery cults thrived. In Platonic terms, we could simply say that during the former period economics, society and psychology were under the ascendancy of Apollo, while, when Dionysos holds sway, chaos, hysteria and revelry prevail.

The classical Chinese also had teachers of the period who advanced diametrically opposed doctrines — Kung Fuzi (Confucius) and Laozi (Lao Tse or Lao Tzu). It is instructive to compare the difference of emphasis with the Hellenic dichotomy.

Confucius taught external morality — that the civilised human being was so by virtue of behaving in conformity with established rationally-based and time-proven customs and social regulations. Laozi, in contrast, taught that morality

was a matter of spiritual integrity, of being rather than behaving — if the heart isn't in it, social manners are a sham and have no true or enduring meaning.

Although there is clearly an extravert/introvert polarity here, both Chinese philosophers engage directly with the nature of human being rather than with the material constitution of the world. In Jung's terms, we would have to say that, in general emphasis, Western civilisation is extraverted and Sinic civilisation introverted.

Of course, Western civilisation has Judaeo-Christian as well as Hellenic roots, which has introduced another factor into the Western cultural inclination.

The prototype of this view of the world is Abraham's offered sacrifice of his son to his God. In this view, there is a higher reality called God which is outside the world, though concerned with its happenings.

It is the apocalyptic undertone of this metaphysics which can be so psychologically damaging.

If the world has no reality in itself, if it is merely the projection or plaything of some omnipotent capricious Entity whose Reality is wholly other, then the continuity of the world is provisional, and may cease tomorrow.

James Hogg's 'Confessions of a Justified Sinner' gives a graphic illustration of the potential moral bankruptcy of such a belief system. When reality as it actually is cannot be distinguished, there is no basis for either morality or science.

Apocalyptic expectations — the belief that the present world could come to an end and a new order instituted overnight — are grist to the mill of such otherwise unlikely bedfellows as Revolutionary Marxists and Nazis, IRA gunmen and ayatollahs. The early Christian missionaries, easily perceiving the mote in their Indian brother's eye, made much of how the Hindu belief in reincarnation was subversive of personal effort in the present life. How much more morally enervating, one might ask, the belief in salvation by grace (or righteous revolution) alone?

The barbarian tendency has managed, since the so-called enlightenment of the 18th Century, almost totally to exclude the idea of Deity as an intellectually necessary postulate. In the face of Copernicus, Newton and Descartes, the Christian Church staged first a supernaturalist reign of terror against the new rational heresy, then completely abandoned the intellectual high ground and withdrew to an embattled enclave shored up by faith alone.

The world itself has been split in a tacit division of powers between organised religion and organised science into mutually exclusive divisions — material, which is solid, visible and verifiable; and spiritual, which isn't.

From being a necessary postulate to explain the total meaning of life, the idea of Deity — and of the implication of each soul's intimate relationship with divinity — has become an optional add-on: invisible and unprovable, literally immaterial; as likely, and all the more miraculously devoid of social context, to manifest in a sliver of bread as in the urgent compassionate need of redemptive humanity.

• **Mundane Barbarity**

The fact is that Western culture gave up on trying to approach questions of totality — of the meaning of life as a global, ever-urgent, mystery. If this is enlightenment, it is the enlightenment of the drunk looking for his lost key under the street lamp — because it's dark at his doorstep where he actually dropped it! This degeneration of cultural concern is what marks the barbarity of modern society. Barbarians, lacking that sense of personal moral integrity that it is the task of civilisation to imbue in its members, degrade by their very presence and every action the social and ecological values they do not perceive in their environment.

As barbarians, we see the world with barbarian eyes : in terms of resources to exploit and advantage to be gained. Other cultures, like our own, we interpret in terms of power structures — who gets to tell whom to do what and who has to do only what they're told. Marxism is a barbarian philosophy in precisely this sense, although Marx recognised that the end goal of revolution was the production of a new humanity unencumbered by oppression and exploitation.

As barbarians, we destroy what we cannot see, we ignore what we cannot understand.

As barbarians, we worship Lady Fortune — and we know that She, most capricious of deities, loves to take away as easily as she bestows her favours. "Grab it while it's going!" rules the barbarian mind, and permeates every aspect of barbarian culture, from romance to funerary customs.

Almost by definition, the materialist paradigm lacks any means to process ideas or perceptions belonging to spiritual dimensions of reality — except to deny their mechanical significance. As barbarians, we only want to know how things work, so we can manipulate them to our own advantage.

• **Genetic Machines**

"If we want to understand how a machine or living body works, we look to its component parts and ask how they interact with each other. If there is a complex thing that we do not yet understand, we can come to understand it in terms of simpler parts that we do already understand.

...the aptest name for my approach to understanding how things work is probably 'hierarchical reductionism'... The hierarchical reductionist ... explains a complex entity at any particular level in the hierarchy of organisation in terms of entities only one level down the hierarchy; entities which, themselves, are likely to be complex enough to need further reducing to their own component parts; and so on...

Reductionism, in this sense, is just another name for an honest desire to understand how things work."

Richard Dawkins : 'The Blind Watchmaker', Longman, Harlow 1986

This analogy from the machine is all very well for explaining the mechanics of things — indeed, how they work. The sleight of hand consistently performed by Dawkins might be more obvious if we were to try to explain a book in terms of its division into chapters, chapters by their division into paragraphs, paragraphs by their construction from sentences, sentences by the grammatical deployment of words, and words by the properties of the alphabet.

All true and necessary enough, but not sufficient to elicit the meaning the author is trying to convey. Moreover, this mechanistic analysis would apply to all books of whatever subject matter and whatever the literary merit or the value of the ideas a book contains.

More generally, someone who could only explain any human activity whatsoever purely in mechanistic terms would be classed as schizophrenic or autistic or psychopathic — at any rate, socially inadequate.

So, at the one level we actually have first-hand experience against which to test the findings of hierarchical reductionism, they are shown not to stand up — perhaps necessary, but not sufficient. So where do we draw the dividing line — between human beings and all other phenomena, or between biological systems and mechanical systems?

The converse to Dawkins' reductionism is the teleological principle — that to understand a simpler thing, we have to understand the purpose it fulfils in the economy of the next higher level in the 'hierarchy of organisation'.

This approach at least has the virtue of moral propriety, which is to say, of being true to humane imperatives. Reductionism, on the other hand, lends itself to instrumentalism, sanctioning any manipulation of the world according to human convenience, without the need to exercise too much conscience. In short, reductionism itself can be explained teleologically, as a culturally determined ideology — institutional barbarism.

• ***Will science ever fail?***

In his article 'Will science ever fail?' (New Scientist, London, 8 August 1992), Peter Atkins, a physical chemist, issues a terrible warning : *"those who seek to found their lives on the vaporous precepts so favoured by religion now find themselves teetering on the brink of an abyss wherein lies truth : the truth of our mortality, the truth of the absence of a benevolent intercessor, the truth of the absence of soul and the truth of the ultimate insignificance of all human activity."*

He then goes on to advance the case of scientism in iconoclastic or post-apocalyptic language :

"We should never underestimate the cultural importance of the intellectual advance that occurred when Newton applied mathematics to nature and showed that humans could predict the future. In a stroke the world became orderly and explicable, at least in small domains of expertise such as the swing of a pendulum and the trajectory of a planet. The other giant step forward came when Darwin established the process of evolution, which showed that rational thought could be applied to the living world."

Oh pity (or despise) our poor primitive ancestors living in the disorderly, inexplicable, irrational world Before Newton — with only wishful thinking to comfort them in the darkness of their ignorance and no hope of applying rational thought to their living sustenance!

Material science doesn't need religion and spiritual science doesn't matter. Of course, this word play is at the rotten core of the fallacy : who is to say that spiritual science isn't important — or, worse, isn't possible? Those who rule such issues out of question right from the start have small claim to be able to make definitive statements on their relevance.

• ***Institutionalised Iconoclasm***

Scientism fosters iconoclasm — a sort of inverted apocalypticism, whereby all earlier forms of knowledge and wisdom held by humans can safely be disregarded, since they didn't know what we now know.

This syndrome is closely related to the modernist arrogance of "We have the technology, not available before."

However admirable and productive iconoclasm may be in individual cases of insight and innovation, normal iconoclasm is equivalent to morally enervating nihilism. It devalues continuity and constancy of culture in favour of discontinuity. It fosters distrust and opportunism over trust and cooperation.

One effect of scientific iconoclasm is to trivialise human experience and culture. Religion is denounced as unscientific because it makes postulates which cannot be refuted by testing.

"1. Religion means belief in 'God'.

2. 'God' is like an old man who lives in the sky.

3. We scientists have looked at the sky and have not found any old men there.

4. Therefore all religious beliefs are fantastic nonsense, and anyone who holds them is simply weak-minded."

The paradoxical effect of the cultural dominance of such arguments is to foster irrationalism, for if all religious or spiritual beliefs are irrational, then there's no reason to discriminate between beliefs or to look more deeply into the interpretation of them.

• ***The Evolution of Consciousness***

"To discover one point and to extend it indefinitely, to comprehend the universe in totality — this is called consciousness."

The Tao of Politics - Lessons of the Masters of Huainan
tr. Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1990

To be conscious is to be responsible for my own life. We call this condition possessing free will, being myself, knowing who I am, showing intelligence, behaving with understanding, relating well to others, fulfilling social duties, being accountable for the consequences of my actions, being human.

In short, consciousness implies relationship and relationship implies mutual acceptance of responsibility. More abstractly, consciousness is a dialogue between actuality (what is happening) and virtuality (what is *as if* it were actually happening — what might be or what used to be or, indeed, what could never be).

Consciousness is engaged in building a narrative bridge between the phenomenal and the imaginal, a story that explains how what is might become what will be, how what was became what is, how something different might have come about, if only...

Subjectivity is the product, not the cause, of excursions in virtuality, exploring the realm which Stephen Hawking calls 'imaginary time', in which the evolving sense of self is a product of a 'summation over histories'.

The self is that which we believe to possess both objectivity and subjectivity, something which is simultaneously virtual and real. I am an imaginal informational entity, the history and narrative of my consciousness.

The self is a mathematical surface of intersection, the boundary of the virtual imagination with the real, a map of where they converge and diverge. If there is no divergence between virtuality and reality, there is no information as to the potential of difference, and no call for consciousness.

Since virtuality is essentially free-floating (mathematically undetermined) the growth of the apparatus of self is a process of rectification and calibration. The consistent presentation of self develops by learning to distinguish fantasy from actuality and by focusing imaginative concern on current operational issues. The over-potentialised embryonic person must begin to realise its physical, emotional and cultural faculties by harnessing the powers of interest, attention and intention to the generation of functionally responsive behaviour.

The human being is literally an evolutionary microcosm in which humanity is emergent from animal, vegetative and biochemical sub-systems. Like the evolution of all organic systems, the development of consciousness is a Darwinian process of "*descent with modification*" producing an adaptive social person through behavioural conditioning and social acculturation.

In essence, Darwin's insight was the operation of a biological law of conservation of energy, that is the application of the principles of thermodynamics to biological systems. Given the mechanisms of generation, conservation and selection of potential, adaptive change is produced by the most efficient route. As ever, thermodynamic efficiency can be defined as the dissipation of entropy i.e. the optimal release of energy with the minimal degenerative disruption.

The Darwinian model of evolutionary adaptation requires generation of variety and selection for reproduction of productive combinations of potential. This principle applies at every level of the developing apparatus of organism, as well as at the population level addressed by classical and neo-Darwinism.

• **Theories of Consciousness : Marx , Freud, Skinner, Dawkins**

Marx posited that consciousness is determinative of behaviour but is itself determined by material (i.e. socioeconomic) conditions. This is akin to the Darwinian concept of specialisation aligning with Adam Smith's efficient economic division of labour to produce an ideology of class fitness to fulfil industrial roles. Marx identified this false consciousness to be an essential component of the way people are constrained to act in ways that deny their own best interests.

Ideological interpretations of this kind suborn higher inclinations to secular interests, power games and systems of control. This kind of description of the world is produced by, and reproduces, subjection to hierarchies of political power.

Freud and Jung disproved the hypothesis that human behaviour is determined solely by consciousness.

They realised that the breakdown of self-coherency in a psychotic episode or a neurotic complex were only extreme symptoms of normal human incoherency.

B. F. Skinner explored the hypothesis that behaviour determines consciousness — so that, indeed, the very postulate of consciousness was no longer required. Mind itself is decreed to be an unnecessary fiction, and operant conditioning (reward and punishment) are sufficient to determine subject behaviour. Here, indeed, the very apotheosis of reductionist sophistry — that which cannot be explained is defined to be irrelevant!

Richard Dawkins is exploring the hypothesis that behaviour is determined by DNA. In evolutionary terms, humanity is very much in the category of a work in progress, a project still unfinished. Far from being the touchstone of consciousness, human conscience may be more like sentience gone mad, if it is cut astray from organic influence and responsibility.

• ***The Public Understanding of Science***

The Oxford Professor of the Public Understanding of Science in a speculative think piece by various futurists in *The Guardian*, Tuesday December 19, 1995:

"Human evolution over the past 3 million years has been largely a matter of the brain blowing up like a balloon. Will this trend continue? Will homo futuris look like the Mekon?"

Two ways of answering both converge on a no. First, there is no generally agreed reason to expect an evolutionary trend of this kind to carry on. Evolutionary trends may reverse or go off sideways. Second, evolutionary trends, even very fast ones like the hominid brain trend, occur over a much longer timescale than humans are used to grasping. To the evolutionist, one million years is not particularly long. So no evolutionary change of any moment will be seen in the next few centuries. The best chance for interesting change arise if space colonists separate themselves irrevocably from the home planet. I expect the discipline of Artificial Life to progress dramatically in the next 10 years and beyond. Simulations of life in computers, in test-tubes and in living hybrid systems, will increasingly blur the distinction between the living and the non-living. There will be a similar blurring between minds and computers. Supernatural views of the world will become increasingly untenable but this does not mean that superstition will necessarily release its hold on weaker human minds."

Surely, change is environmentally driven and selection directs evolution. So, it is not the absolute timescale that determines the rate of change, but the degree of environmental instability. The appearance of change reflects the degree of adaptation that is favoured.

• ***Sentience***

The physicist, Paul Davies, believes that consciousness is "*a fundamental property — a fundamental emergent property — of nature, a natural consequence of the outworking of the laws of physics. In other words, consciousness is something that doesn't depend crucially on some specific little accident somewhere along the evolutionary way.* [which Davies describes as the 'biologists' party line'] *To be sure, the details of our mentality will depend on the minor and accidental specifics of our evolutionary history..."*

In fact, there can be no doubt about the centrality of sentience to organic evolution. The ability to sense one's environment and respond appropriately to changing conditions is fundamental to life.

We would hardly distinguish organisms from their environment if they did not consistently exhibit sentient purpose. At the gross level, a cloud is clearly not sentient — it is a phenomenon, not an organism. At the subtle level, the distinction is harder, perhaps impossible to resolve. Is a virus an organism? Is a chromosome an organism? Surely, a gene is a chemical compound, not an organism.

This is where the half-baked ideology which conceives of genes as being, in some sense, 'selfish' is so unhelpful, indeed pernicious, to understanding.

The sense of self is an emergent phenomenon — which is to say, it only makes sense at a level of functional organisation integrating a complex biological community. Evolution does not operate on genes — there is no such thing as natural selection of DNA — what is selected is effective behaviour.

The distinction between sentience and consciousness depends upon the range and repertoire of available (potential) behaviours. In principle, sentience is finite, consciousness infinite. We might say that a conscious being is one whose behaviour is endlessly malleable and who can respond to any environmental change with appropriate and effective change of habit.

Independence of environment depends upon comprehensive and acute responsivity to environmental challenge. This is the goal of intelligence — consistency of output regardless of input.

• ***Information is that which changes behaviour***

At the most basic level of physical interaction and chemical exchange with the environment, the feedback loop between change and adaptive behaviour is immediate and mechanical.

The first significant divergence from automatism comes with the development of the perceptual apparatus — with the ability to receive and store information.

As soon as there is information, there is the possibility of difference, which is to say, the emergence of virtuality.

Information is the lifeblood of accelerated evolution. The ability to abstract information from mere thermodynamic exchange is what distinguishes living systems from non-living activity. Information is operational. In Gregory Bateson's formulation, a bit of information is a "*difference that makes a difference*".

The reception of intelligence — the perception of a significant piece of information — brings about a change in the state of the receptor. This change of state itself propagates a series of changes. From an external standpoint, the system may be seen to start to behave differently. Information overcomes inertia.

At the most elementary level, this is the degree of freedom of behaviour which distinguishes animate from inanimate systems. A classical Newtonian mechanical system continues in its path, or remains at rest, until it is affected by an external physical input of energy. A stone falling into the sun receives ample information — in a rising photonic flux at its surface and increasing internal perturbation of its atoms — as to the direction its path is leading, enough indeed to permit precise extrapolation of its impending fate. Its future is wholly implicit in its present state, but lacking any means to alter that state to change its path, all this information cannot be applied — it is operationally meaningless.

Intelligence is the application of information towards the optimisation of a system's present and projected future state. Intelligence processes information and produces survival. It does not matter how complex a system's reception of information, its intelligence is bounded by its ability to make effective behavioural responses to information input or received from its environment. The only information that is significant is data whose magnitude or trend can be changed through organismic action.

Adaptation, as such, can be seen at quite a simple thermodynamic level in the physicochemical dissipative structures analysed by Prigogine, such as the patterns of bubbles in a pan of water coming to the boil on a stove.

As the environment changes, the body of water changes — it adapts to absorb the energy and dissipate the entropy produced in any thermodynamic process. Instead of exploding, the pan comes gradually to the boil and simmers away, depending on the flow of energy being applied.

Intelligent adaptation does not merely change its state to reflect environmental change, but rather seeks to maintain its internal state by changing its environment.

Gratuitous information, that you have no means of acting upon, is meaningless or, worse, inimical to survival. By the Iron Law of Darwinism, information is that which has survival value i.e. that which it is worth the organism's while noticing and responding to.

The costs and benefits of information processing are proportionate to the behavioural capability to avoid direct and opportunity costs and to act so as to optimise energy throughput.

What is relevant to an organism is what might make a difference to its probability of its surviving as a healthy functional entity.

• **Chemistry**

At a chemical level, the living system is a cauldron of hormones and neurotransmitters. All plant and animal tissue ingested by humans (and other organisms) has been found to be literally suffused with neuroactive substances. Carbohydrates alone cannot explain why we like some foods and abhor others or how we come to appreciate the subtleties of acquired tastes. The sophisticated palate is a highly functionalised neurochemical sampler.

Biochemistry is the pre-eminent 20th Century science — all the rest including, perhaps especially, nuclear/quantum physics, are whistling in the dark for mutual comfort by comparison. It is a science where modelling reigns supreme. A model need not be true, as long as it is effective in generating predictable results.

Biochemists are mapping an unknown world or, rather, a world we all know and have our being in, but can only intuit by its effects and not define. To model the chemistry of a system is not to understand it, but to be able to manipulate its behaviour in controllable or at least statistically predictable directions. It is this bias to instrumentality that lends biochemical thinking the cachet of being the last bastion of the mechanistic paradigm.

The acquisition of biochemical models has been accelerated by the need to cope with the unforeseen 'side-effects' of earlier crude interventions in biochemical systems with medical intent. Thus the 20th Century Faust in the modern alchemical laboratory.

To intervene is to put your own self outside the system you want to manipulate — to divorce subject from object. The instrumental persuasion (putting ends over means) is the temptation before every magus, scientist or seeker after knowledge.

That the alchemist explained his experiments as "seeking to turn lead into gold" was something ordinary people could relate to, in intention if not in method. In

practice, the mediaeval alchemist was a specialist in organic chemistry, though using the language of inorganic chemistry — ‘stones’ and ‘metals’.

In language no more metaphorical, the aim was to find the key to unlock the golden door back into Eden; to digest the apple from the tree of self-knowledge; psychologically, as Jung’s studies of alchemy suggest, the adept sought to resolve the tragedy of conscient organism — of being always in two places at once.

The organism integrates neural perceptions and conceptions — the actual and the virtual. There is reinforcement and amplification where apperceptions and intentions coincide. Instinct or inclination essays, then confirms adaptive behaviour. Decisions are settled, actions are taken, sense of self and of community is reinforced. Intelligent adaptation to environmental variation is the secret of life.

Such a premium is placed on being able to predict what will happen next in critical circumstances, that this may be regarded as the prime function of organic intelligence. Paradoxically, this may favour the ability to drift into fantasy and temporarily cut oneself off from actuality. Practice in virtuality through play and ritual has survival value — by shifting bits rather than atoms, as Nicholas Negroponte of the MIT MediaLab expresses it.

Rather than the most recent, Virtual Reality may be the earliest invention of the human species.

- ***Signs and Symbols***

*“For there is name but not nature in words...
The Way that can be named is not the Eternal Way.”*

Laozi

To name something is to evoke the illusion (and this is indeed, the inherent magical power and snare of language) that the subject has been pinned down, verbally mapped and understood. Words, though they seem to stand alone in their black-and-white certainty, only convey meaning as a result of being interpreted in the light of the recipient’s knowledge of the referents in the real or imagined world.

Carl Jung identifies two modes in which words and other conventional or archetypal images operate — as Signs, or as Symbols.

The distinction is that a Sign points to a known destination — such-and-such always and only means so-and-so; whereas a Symbol points to an unknown — a truth or meaning which can be recognised but not rigorously defined.

It is precisely our predicament that language is increasingly limited to use as a system of signs and that the symbol-forming function is manipulated and debased. Not just that, but our experience of the world becomes circumscribed by linguistic facility — the naming of gods. Symbols are co-opted into signs to induce the consumer reflex with slogans and baubled dreams.

The dreamlike style of much modern advertising seeks to associate universal human emotions like attraction, peace, satisfaction, sociability (symbols all) with a specific commercial product or service. No matter the functional utility, or even value for money of the actual product — no attempt is made to offer concrete or testable assertions, only to suggest a generalised well-being of the happy consumer.

“Believe what I say, not what you see!” is the consistent sub-text of the modern information industry, as it has always been of totalitarian systems of social control, which is to say mind-control. What matters to the opinion former, demagogue or advertising executive is the after-effects of exposure to their wares — what you take away with you, what you have assimilated (made to be as if of your own substance.)

The dream comes alive as operant conditioning when you awake. The imprint remains as a post-hypnotic suggestion or association — which the advertiser hopes will influence your consumer profile towards increasing the sales of his product.

Modern audio-visual media can deploy a whole range of wonderful techniques to promoting acceptance of their virtuality, but the most basic medium of all, the spoken or (even more abstract) written word has always been able to evoke powerful manifestations of virtuality. The characteristic side-to-side scanning movements of the eyeballs in REM sleep shown in laboratory observation of dreamers associates not just to the identical physiological actions while reading, but perhaps also to the imprinting mating displays of wild geese and teenage humans.

Interest is caught, libido aroused, imagination goes to work.

The intentional imagination builds up a virtual attractor surface, to which events will tend to conform, to the degree to which other causative influences either reinforce or are indifferent to the intended outcome.

Matter is indifferent to events — whenever there is a divergence of possibilities, probabilities are equalised. It is even said that the mathematical equations of fundamental physics give no indication of the flow of time from the past through the present to the future. Objectively, ‘present time’ is only one possible state on a whole quantified spectrum of probability.

Our experience is otherwise — having only one actual history, only one real now, we nevertheless postulate a range of possible futures.

Moreover, we are convinced that we possess, to some ill-defined degree, a power of determinative choice or, at least, an influence over the future — in short, that we may exercise ‘free will’.

Without this postulate, our morality, our intelligence, is a farrago.

• ***Virtualising Reality***

Imagination is the ability to form images or pictures (or songs, poems or stories) in the mind i.e. in virtuality. The imagination is an infinite, and an infinitely plastic, realm. It embodies the transcendent operator — the cosmic get-out clause. This operator may perform a total inversion, or simply flip the most significant bit, and chaos ensues — everything changes, predicates disappear, arguments get lost in recursion. Nothing is fixed forever.

Misunderstanding the implications of virtuality is at the root of the 20th Century disputes between Creationists and Evolutionists, indeed between different schools of Evolutionists. Hence, too, the reaction of Muslim fundamentalists to Salman Rushdie’s explorations of virtuality.

What is virtual is threatening precisely because it is indistinguishable from the real. For example, there is no physiological difference between the body’s

reaction to the threat from a virtual tiger (in a dream or other hallucination) and an actual tiger. The body is all in the self, but the self is not all in the body.

In the virtual dimension, quantum probabilistic effects rule. Wave functions collapse in catastrophic instantiation bound to complex attractor surfaces. The continuum of material probability dissolves into discrete and mutually exclusive patterns of meaning. The complex metafunction 'I', the integrator, identity, the whole story, is bound but not constrained by the flexions of time and space, intention and meaning, history and mystery.

The only reason a program runs on a computer is through the choice of a user. The meaning of the program only resides in what its input and output mean to the human users, indeed how they are changed or enriched by the experience of interacting with the program. "Things are real, then, only when I am". $I=1$. This Identity is the essence of all things and events. This is the ever-present Plenum of existence, Who alone can say, not metaphorically, "I am that I am."

The level or integration of Entity is the only one which can truly be said to be self-sustaining — for no other Self or system subsists, save by living on something else. There is in Reality only one Self-subsistent Being, whether known as Allah or Dao, Brahma, Buddha or God, the True, the Real, the All-Inclusive.

Conflict between gods is actually dispute between human tribes and differing ideas, fears and interests. By whatever name you approach Truth, the Truth remains constant, only the seeking varies. Knowledge of (which is to say, participation in) this Unanimity is what is required, not just belief, faith or opinion. Every need will be met. Every wish is an extension of imagination — an offering of being to non-being. All possibilities exist for a reason, or a mystery.

• ***Reason and Language***

Language creates our environment. Conversely, the way our linguistic potential is selected and realised is an environmental function. All ordering involves this two-way process — it is what it means to be an organism; it is what it means to be an environment. Naming is the science of appearances — we descry and describe objects by their surfaces, which is to say, largely by their reflection of electromagnetic radiation in the visible waveband.

The idea 'environment' conjures up images — a tree, a river, a cloud. Most people would agree that their environment includes objects called trees, rivers and clouds. In reality, there is no object called a tree — rather, the ecological process of treeing, an organic system of matter and energy exchange and biochemical transformation. There is no object called a river — rather, a channel in which water flows; no objective cloud, rather a volume of humid air.

It is only because we are accustomed to thinking in snapshots and communicating in soundbites that we fall into the habit of dividing our environment into labelled categories. Every time I look at a tree, it is different — moving, growing, changing through the seasons; a river is proverbially an ever-flowing irreversible stream; look again, and a cloud may be gone.

"Reason, or the ratio of all we have already known, is not the same that it shall be when we know more."

William Blake

As Blake points out, what we consider to be reasonable depends upon the scope of our knowledge. The ironic implication is that reason is a device or tool whose purpose is not to extend knowledge, but rather to prescribe what may be usefully known. We use reason to test new experiences and ideas to see if they fit our established model of the way things are, or the way things work.

This is like the traditional method of programming a computer. The software analyst determines what range of events the proposed system must handle and defines the business rules governing how each type of event should be processed. This system model is translated into computer operations and branching instructions, then the completed system is tested to ensure that it responds as expected to the design range of inputs.

When faced with an unexpected situation, this kind of program will either ignore the input, process it (erroneously) in terms of an event that it is equipped to handle (with consequences that cannot be determined), or seize up entirely and be unable to do anything whatsoever.

A good computer system gives up gracefully when confronted with an error condition, a bad (disgraceful) system keeps going until disaster intervenes.

Living systems cannot afford to behave like this. Success and catastrophe are not binary outcomes in real life. Intelligence is not reducible to reason. It requires the exercise of intuition.

• *Use your Intuition*

Intuition is knowledge that is derived synthetically rather than analytically. Literally, it means knowing what is real by looking within rather than without. It seems to involve a leap in the dark, a mystical perception of the truth. The word mystical comes from a Greek root meaning 'to close the eyes.'

Western philosophical thought, founded on the Socratic method of disputation, has always had difficulties with the intuitive mode, which asserts certainty rather than deriving it through logical verification of postulates. The problem with intuition is not when it cannot be proved, it is when it cannot be disproved.

Not accidentally, the same problem arises with 'intelligent' computer systems — the neural network which arrives at a solution but cannot explain how. Intuition is fallible because it deals with the unknown; reason is fallible because it ignores the unknown. Like the indeterminacy principle of quantum physics, the closer you pin reality down, the more it spreads out around your probe.

The known comprises not only what we know of our own character and habit, it also includes everything which we can explain to ourselves. The unknown, by definition, goes beyond our comprehension.

The distinction exists only in the mind, and is reflexively the very definition of mind itself. Which is to say, mind denies its own finality — it is only present in coming to know — at the interface where the known edges into the unknown. Where knowledge suffices, consciousness is no longer required. Facts alone do not explain anything. For that, their significance must be interpreted in a frame of reference in which they are no longer isolated events but particular evidence of general principles.

Mind, in short, implies decision not mere prehension. An amoeba prehends its environment and instinctively reacts. Its range of response is limited, so its need to decide what to do is relatively simple. In fact, the less energy required to support the overhead of cogitation, the more efficient the biological device.

• ***Applied Intelligence***

Information science addresses the issues of production of knowledge and the generation of appropriate response. The origins of computing are in military applications, specifically ballistics and cryptography. The engineering of mechanical methods of solving such problems quickly showed the superiority of the computer over the human brain in these tightly prescribed domains. In principle, there seemed to be no reason why other fields of human thought might not prove equally susceptible to mechanisation.

In the early days of the 'Artificial Intelligence' project, research concentrated on a philosophical model of the world comprising a set of operational constructs or hierarchy of linguistic categories, coupled with a set of logical transforms to manipulate mental objects. In essence this amounts to computerisation of encyclopaedia.

Knowledge-based systems, as they are now more properly designated, have produced many useful techniques, including text retrieval and browsing, spell checkers and thesauruses, but, in spite of the exponential growth in computing power over the last 50 years, have not proved capable of emulating more basic functions of natural intelligence.

This realisation prompted a reappraisal of organic methods for producing appropriate responses to environmental effects. Instead of looking to philosophy, AI researchers turned to biology and found a complementary pair of technical paradigms, the neural network and the genetic algorithm.

Neural computing was born from a consideration of how individual brain cells are wired up and architected to constitute a coherent unit of information processing. Rather than the Either/Or logic beloved of the philosophers, a neural net embodies the fuzzy or bendy logic beloved of nature. Physically, the neural model showed how individual binary components wired up to as many of their neighbours as topologically possible would behave analogously to Stephen Hawking's quantum orbits. In other words, neural particles would start to behave in a wavelike manner, where certain inputs fail to resonate and thus dissipate, whereas other inputs are reinforced and propagate through the system.

A neural net is potentiated connectivity — it is governed and operated by the way connections are reinforced or inhibited. A neural net is self-organising in the sense that it operates by adaptation and learning, or by training and conditioning outputs given certain inputs.

The genetic algorithm is based on consideration of biological reproductive behaviour. This produced the concept that an efficient process of achieving goals would be to generate a large number strategies, then to select those which respond most favourably to form the seeds of a further generation of possibilities. Given a rapid succession of generations, an efficient process of selection of outcomes converges on appropriate and often extraordinary solutions in a very powerful manner.

• ***Amplifying Improbability***

The Modern Darwinian Synthesis brings together the principles of evolution through natural selection identified by Darwin with the informational mechanics of Mendelian genetics and the more recent understanding of the crucial role of the biochemistry of ribonucleic acids.

Darwinian natural selection is a two-edged sword — it operates both by favouring and by curtailing the generation of variety. Conservation and innovation are the complementary essential characteristics of life. Mendel discovered the operation of dominant and recessive traits which were later discovered to be modulated through the diploid chromosomal structure.

We now understand how the chromosomal organisation of genetic material sorts and optimises the association of mutually favourable adaptations. We have also discovered how the bihelical structure of deoxyribonucleic acid allows the encoding, storage, verification and processing of genetic information. DNA is the medium in which is written the book of life, the map or encyclopaedia of the organic reality of our species.

Frank J. Tipler has shown that in the informational universe, it is not origins but destinations that matter.. ('The Physics of Immortality : Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead' Doubleday, 1994)

The Many Worlds Interpretation of the mathematics of matter shows a branching of alternative time-tracks at every moment of quantum uncertainty. In explaining how an 'object' got from 'origin' A to 'destination' B (where A and B are observed locations in a multi-dimensional phase space of the potential transformations involved) the 'true' path can only be defined as a summation across histories. Every possibility contributes its probability, however small, to the apparent outcome.

The successive reintegration of potential through variation, recombination and selective attention underlies the very physicality of existence.

There is no need for any duality of mind and matter, for the same forces are at work on the same substance, the information comprehending, construing and constituting every level of reality. It may be, as Tipler suggests, perhaps like the difference in 'level of implementation' between long-term (e.g. disk storage) and current working memory (RAM) in computer systems.

The long term memory of our species is coded in the gene pool of DNA, the medium term in cultural media, the short term in interactive neural configurations of the members of our species (and others).

Rather than needing to be programmed in advance, the evolutionary self-organising self-programming information system is ultimately hardware (implementation) independent i.e. transcendent in the traditional sense. The memory of our species is an implementation of a global ecological niche.

General Relativity and Quantum Thermodynamics confirm the Post-Modern Synthesis of evolutionary ecology in which mutuality of adaptation is brought into the foreground.

Organism and environment evolve only together, which is to say, selection operates in both directions — organisms select the fittest (most suitable) environment as well as vice versa.

Selection is a cybernetic process, sorting and optimising the application of information. The anthropic principle at work is the dissipation of entropy in the amplification of improbability — maximising the usage of information.

The value of information is the opportunity for improbable development, moving further from the deadening equilibration of entropy. Time is life's path through juggling improbability. What is likely — sufficiently determined by the past to be predicted — is already dead, a Monty Python parrot, devoid of futurity.

That which can be fully defined has no interest, returns no yield of information, no realisation of value to come. What is of interest is where there is an opportunity for growth or a threat from the unknown.

The path of consciousness is to make a difference, to swing the balance of the probabilities in unprecedented directions. Intelligence at every level is information in action. Who knows, wins. Inadvertence kills.

• *The Metabolism of Information*

Information is the inverse of entropy. All expenditure of energy results in an increase in entropy. Conversely, every change produces an increase in information.

In purely, energetic terms, entropy stands for the remorseless degradation of available and potential resources into a form where the environmental cost of extraction exceeds the calorific value released. This running-down tendency is what scientists call 'real' or 'proper' time.

In the test-tube, warm water becomes cooler at a calculable rate depend upon volume, surface area, thermal conductivity and the difference between the temperature of the water and the ambient temperature of the lab. If we want the water to stay at a particular temperature, we have to keep applying energy. If heat diffusion is allowed to proceed without further input, the difference in temperature between an object and its environment reduces to zero (plus or minus temporary random fluctuations).

In reality, something else is going on — information is being produced. In the example, a scientist is performing an experiment — taking measurements, constructing a narrative and construing an explanation of the observed event or process. In principle, the scientist is unnecessary, information is produced and continues to exist after the event has ceased to happen.

The quantum uncertainty principle is an observationally derived theorem about the irreducibility of information to isolated facts. The Many Worlds Interpretation is the equivalent to the classical principle of the Conservation of Energy. The concept of entropy is needed to explain how energy can be 'used up' and yet be conserved in totality. It explains how change irreversibly increases the probability of the new arrangement of material resources.

Potential energy is in the improbable state of being concentrated and poised for release. Energy is degraded in every thermodynamic transaction — paradoxically, as probability increases, order is lost. The ultimate probable state is of pervasive disorder.

The confusion arises because information is inherently two-dimensional, not just factual but also dependent upon application. Abstract information (pure data or fact) is to do with mathematical and physical probability — the more unlikely a particular event or circumstance, the more significant this information.

This begs the question of significance, which is the operational dimension of information. Data is only of use to me if I know what to do about it — in short, if it is capable of changing my behaviour. The value of information to me depends upon my capacity to make use of it.

This is the sense of the word, order, in this context. We might say that the state of maximal entropy, disorder or probability, is such that there is no pocket of energy left that any living system could make any use of. Although they are treated as synonyms in common discourse, in this context, disorder is the

opposite of chaos. Chaos is equivalent to maximal improbability, or to a surfeit of information over understanding.

As the thermodynamicist Ilya Prigogine has shown, living chemical and biological systems survive by moving away from entropic equilibrium. They take advantage of the environmental chaos of energetic improbability to maintain and develop internal order. The principle of self-organisation (*autopoiesis*) is the improbability drive inherent to all evolutionary systems.

As information is the converse to entropy, so life is the converse of time. Time is the direction of increasing probability or simplicity, life is the direction of increasing information or complexity.

Technically, chaos is the inability in principle to predict what comes next, whereas maximal entropy is the inability in principle to discriminate between successive states. In the limit, this represents the end of change, the literal end of time. Where the possibility of change still exists, what Prigogine calls dissipative systems are at work, dissipating entropy and segregating pockets of improbable ordered arrangements of matter.

This process permits the emergence of complexity far from thermodynamic equilibrium with its environment. Like the concept of order, complexity is an intuitive assessment of the quantity of information embodied in a material organisation.

Darwinian selection favours the most effective employment of information. DNA is significant precisely because it provides an efficient vehicle for the storage, replication and transmission of genetic information. It makes no more sense to talk of the selfish gene than it does of the selfish neuron or the selfish semiconductor. DNA does not govern evolution any more than cars control people's need to get somewhere quick.

Richard Dawkins ('River Out of Eden', Basic Books, 1995) is seriously misled by his own rhetoric (and, worse, misleading) in identifying *"The true utility function of life, that which is maximised in the natural world, is DNA survival."* He does not even mean DNA at large, but little packets of chemicals which he thinks have *"levers of power"* at their *"disposal"*. The very indifference of DNA to purpose and meaning is, for Dawkins, the definition of the true faith. *"God's utility function betrays its origins in an uncoordinated scramble for selfish gain."*

It is that 'uncoordinated' that betrays Dawkins' hidden agenda, his wilful ignorance of cultural history. God is a metaphor for one's own self writ large. Dawkins' credo is simply a more pretentious version of Margaret Thatcher's *"There is no such thing as society, only individuals."* In informational terms, these statements are arrant nonsense.

Clearly society is anything but uncoordinated, no less so the ecological interaction of organisms and natural resources. Evolution is the metabolism of information. This has no implication of being coordinated in some way from the outside, which seems to be the only source of order that a Dawkins or a Thatcher might recognise.

If, instead of setting up and knocking down Aunt Sallies of his own imagined contrivance, Dawkins would try to develop a more sophisticated understanding of what the utility function of God might be (since, even in his own terms, at least the idea of God has to be a product of natural selection), he would find in the Qu'ran, *"God created the world because He loved to be known."*

It does not take much of a leap in the dark to suppose that maximisation of information may indeed be the utility function of existence. The esoteric teachings and the relativistic mathematics of quantum cosmology are close to unanimous on this subject. The Qu'ranic teachings "*God created the world out of compassion for His potentials*" and "*Allah is Lord of the universes*" are both confirmed in the Many Worlds Interpretation — which also ratifies the essential unitary justice of creation.

The theological argument and the scientific proof are set out by Frank J. Tipler in 'The Physics of Immortality.' It is a matter of context and perspective where integrative meaning is evolutionarily emergent from informational chaos.

Information is about difference, understanding is about synthesis, 'putting 2 and 2 together'. This is also at the root of the paradox of consciousness which is constantly in refutation of its own perseverance, the impersonation of the essentially transcendent.

In short, the human perception of purpose is heavily determined by natural selection. The God to which Dawkins strenuously objects is a projection of ignorance upon the cosmos. Like Freud, he presents a caricature of religion as nothing more than fantasy compensating for emotional deprivation.

• **Information is Connection**

The informational content of morality is connectional. Information is the intersection of data with purpose, of fact with possible consequence.

In quantum terms, the association of cause and effect is probabilistic. Every fact implies a range of consequences rather than any absolute value. Facts are wavelike and generate interference patterns in imaginary time (in the phase-space of bionomic possibility).

Conceptually, an event takes place somewhere and sometime — at a point in space and time. Wolfgang Pauli hypothesised that each such 4-dimensional location really was unique, that it could not be occupied by more than one such particulate event. This quantum exclusion principle is what gives solidity to matter.

Pauli's Exclusion Principle leads directly to its quantum converse in Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle (the realisation of the fundamental inability of an observer to define the exact location of a particle simultaneously with its precise momentum) and ultimately to the Many Worlds Interpretation — which allows many virtual events to occur at the same place and time without offending Mr. Pauli.

All of which is to say that the informational potential of a 'single' event is multi-dimensional. The relation of every Pauli event to every other possible Pauli event is an enormous but, as Frank J. Tipler has shown, probably not infinite number of virtual bits. So where does this information reside? — not just in 4-D Pauli space but in the virtual hyperspace of quantum probabilities — every possible which-might-have-been-otherwise.

Each event produces many interpretations. Valid interpretations are those which are useful. It is not so much a matter of chance and necessity as power and necessity. Power is the efficient application of information. Necessity modulates replication, variation, selection and conservation of potential.

Thermodynamic rather than purposeful in itself, evolution favours the generation, survival and ramification of purposeful entity. Optimisation is subject to constant testing and reinforcement.

Purposiveness is not reducible to potential, as the information resource of a species is not reducible to DNA. Purpose favours realisation of the unpredictable integration of previously unrelated information. From the seed of purpose, intelligence grows.

The flower of evolutionary purpose is the realisation of integrity. That which survives is that which makes optimal use of the global information resource. As humanity is beginning to realise, the survival and continuity of intelligence depends upon the sustainment and further development of a complex ecological environment.

The step to the climax awareness is when the very success of a species 'at war with nature' propels intelligent recognition of 'responsibility for nature' as the only sustainable path. Humanity, indeed, is nature reaching the sphere of self-reflection. Cheetahs are built to catch gazelles, gazelles to escape being eaten by cheetahs. No-one expects gazelles to think fondly of this ecological relationship — it takes an objective eye to perceive the beauty and mutual benignity of the process.

Balance resides only in integrity, in a higher order of information processing than in the DNA of the respective species. The reciprocity of the predator/prey relationship is of exquisite intimacy in the beholding eye of the scientific or spiritual observer.

• ***The Three Laws of Cyberdynamics***

Cyberdynamics is the science of information flows, as thermodynamics is the science of energy flows.

The first law of cyberdynamics is the principle of requisite variety: a governing mechanism must be at least as complex as the range of inputs it needs to model and control. Information can only be created, never destroyed.

The second law of cyberdynamics is that when two information systems engage in free interaction, the more complex system integrates the less ordered system into its worldset. Precisely converse to the action of thermodynamic entropy, when information diffuses, new connections are made — the overall informational 'temperature' (i.e. improbability) rises!

Laozi refers to this law, *"A large country rules a small country like the ocean rules the rivers by which it is fed."* Everything that is of value is so because of its information account. Information is news that something could be different. Wealth is the power to choose. Culture is the self-defined meanings we attach to the choices we make, in virtuality as in actuality.

In principle, money (the structuring currency of social exchange) is no more capable of being selfish than genes are. Economics is about more than the survival of funds, just as ecology is about more than the survival of DNA. Ultimately, resources are cultural, which is to say that their extrinsic value is greater than could be predicted from knowledge of their intrinsic energetic or material content.

Information is neutral until it provokes response, as money is neutral until someone wants to spend it. Information is nothing until it changes something,

money is nothing without preference. Preference organises things in its own interest.

This implies the projection of possible opportunities, comparative evaluation and selection of a preferred option or result. Self-organising optimisation is the natural and progressive outcome of Darwinian ecodynamics. Compassionate purpose and connectional mutuality is emergent from evolution. The ultimate responsibility is self-understanding.

Which brings us to the third law of cyberdynamics: the converse to thermal absolute zero is informational absolute integrity. As long as there is something to happen, there is something new to be known, something unexpected might happen! Information continues to associate and accumulate in the self-knowledge of integral being as long as there is time to learn and understand more. No component of the informational process can encompass the totality of meanings.

"The Dao that can be named is not the eternal Dao." The ultimate self-understanding is the realisation of the meaningless of self as a nodal point of knowledge. The living knowledge of the whole is irreducible to the terms of any organic creature, although it lives in the informational content of every being. The unreality of the personal self is the doorway to the Mind of Dao, defined by Liu I-Ming as unaffected sensitivity devoid of self-consciousness.

"The Mind of Dao is a mind that is not minding. Minding means having the human mentality; when one has the human mentality, one lacks the Mind of Dao. The mind of the human mentality is not the real mind. The Mind of Dao is real, the human mentality is artificial. When you use the artificial mind, sensing is inaccurate... when you use the real mind, sensing is true."

Liu I-Ming on hexagram 31 'Sensitivity'

"The Taoist I Ching' tr. Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1986

• **The Artificial Mind**

The artificial mind is dominated by drawing distinctions, by entertaining ideas and exercising opinions. It represents a filtration of experiential data, discarding information deemed to be irrelevant, constructing reductionist hypotheses. Explanation is constrained by partial concerns and by instrumental considerations. Far from delivering objective understanding, this mentality is hemmed in by all sorts of unacknowledged subjectivities.

Morris Berman in 'The Reenchantment of the World' (Cornell University Press, 1981) argues that the Cartesian dualism on which much modern scientific thinking is based is fatally flawed because *"it contains participating consciousness even while denying it"* and so it *"may not be epistemologically superior to the occult world view..."* — in other words, that reductionism is itself in fact indistinguishable from superstition.

His points are :

- "1. Although the denial of participation lies at the heart of modern science, the Cartesian paradigm as followed in actual practice is riddled with participating consciousness."*
- "2. The deliberate inclusion of participation in our present epistemology would create a new epistemology, the outlines of which are just now becoming visible."*

3. *The problem of radical relativism disappears once participation is acknowledged as a component of all perception, cognition and knowledge of the world.*"

Radical relativism implies that there is no such thing as absolute truth, only particular conditioned views, and that reality is a cultural artefact or sociological fiction of which there can only be biased opinions. If all feelings are regarded as suspect and to be ruled out of conventional discourse, then the inevitable paradoxical result is that discourse is dominated by unacknowledged emotional reactions.

• ***False Ideas of Self***

"The inherent goodness in people is the place wherein people are human, where they should remain all their lives and never leave for a moment."

Liu I-Ming on hexagram 52 'Mountains'

'The Taoist I Ching' tr. Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1986

What obstructs everyday recognition and practice of behaviour appropriate to the self-realisation of integrity is the distraction of our attention by false concepts of ourselves, by false understanding of our sex and sexuality, by fruitless speculation about the length and quality of life versus its shortness and shortcomings, and by false identification with life as a bloody struggle terminating in death.

All of these artificial and often lurid ideas are fostered in us during our development as functioning social entities. They represent the cultural conditioning, both conscious and unconscious, of existence as a specific individual in a particular society at a certain point in history. What is most personal to us is what we share with all our fellow companions on the voyage of selfhood. As Susie Orbach says, *"Our sense of autonomy only evolves in the context of meaningful and sustaining connections to others."*

At adolescence, this ambiguity between the personal and social becomes most marked. A child is not a reflective being — simply living and growing from day to day, from year to year, is enough. It is in teenage that self-reflection starts to become problematic. We are looking for a role to play or a niche to fulfil, and we are able to shift and modify our persona to resemble who we imagine we might like to be. This is how we begin to identify ourselves, to define our personalities and adopt the attitudes we find most congenial.

We take on the characteristics and become what we like or are like, and reject what we dislike or are unlike, according to our kind and kindred. This adopted or adapted personality is necessarily partial since it is composed in the main of boundaries we have had drawn or have drawn ourselves. "This is what I am like, and to hell with anything else." Absolute awareness becomes conditioned by partiality and superstition and we come to see and respond only to what we have selected.

• **Empathy, Antipathy, Sympathy**

*"Success and happiness are deviations from virtue,
likes and dislikes are a burden to the mind,
joy and anger are excesses on the way."*

Laozi

Daoism is the science of recognising the essential nature of reality and of putting unified perception into practice. This implies absolute engagement with and conscientisation of the data of personal experience. Rather than any kind of rejection of the world, Laozi describes enlightenment as becoming *"one with the dust"* of material existence.

Every person has an innocent empathy with all creatures, indeed with all objects of perception. We are equipped with a superb apparatus for imagining what it must be like to see things from a different point of view. As children, we are natural animists, imbuing everything we see and touch with soul and consciousness. We make no distinction between matter and spirit, we empathise with every toy, every picture in a book. This is the angelic, amoral phase of self-development. The exercise of imaginative empathy is the fundamental early process of organic engagement with the world.

The second phase of moral development is the exercise of antipathy. In the child, antipathy is just as pure and instinctive a bodily response as empathy. If empathy derives from the absolute permeability of the self to other selves — from oneness between the subject and object of experience — then antipathy represents the pole of otherness. Antipathy is the absolute rejection of the world from the self.

Antipathy is the assertion of one's absolute otherness that is denied in the absolute no-otherness of empathy. These are elemental states of being, not merely emotions measurable by degree. Empathy is 'same-feeling' becoming 'fellow-feeling'; antipathy is 'other-feeling' becoming 'self-feeling'.

Belonging and alienation are our twin birthright, the necessary mark of incarnation. Ontologically, what we are, along with what we are not, define the self. Empathy is the substance of self and antipathy its boundary.

The beginnings of self-knowledge are in recognition of what we like (are like) and what we dislike (are unlike). We are defined by what we gather together and what we reject.

Empathy is dispersal of the boundaries of self in the direct infantile prehension of one's identity with the world. Antipathy is the drawing of boundaries — inside here, me; outside there, other than me.

Paradoxically, antipathy arises from the same fact as empathy, the fact of involvement with the world. If empathy is the free acceptance of involvement of oneself with the world, then antipathy is denial, not of the fact of involvement, but of the force of involvement. Empathy is sharing closeness to essential involvement, an assertion of one's identity with the world; antipathy is assertion of the uniqueness of one's involvement with life by distancing oneself from one's environment.

Empathy and antipathy define the polarities of subjectivity — absolute inclusion and absolute exclusion — the field of selfhood between uniqueness of perspective and identity with everyone and everything else. As such, the virtual cursor of self, the focused but evanescent consciousness of the reflexive first

person, becomes itself an ambiguous object which arouses both empathy and antipathy. The inclusive self resents the exclusion implied in carnality. The self of the child is separating from its environment — which really means, from itself. The unbounded becomes bound by circumstance.

Distance is necessary if one is to gain perspective on one's own life. Real separation between self and environment is not possible, so virtual distance is invented — by overcoming empathy with antipathy. Antipathy is the development of empathy, not simply its negation.

The ambivalent accommodation between empathy and antipathy as logical categories of experience is the dialectical field within which the developing person discovers their own character. Along convergent and divergent paths, the sense of self as a potentially responsible actor in the play of events begins to take shape.

The need is for operative realisation of involvement — for subjectivity fine-tuned to its environment, and motivated to manipulate that environment in its own favour. It is necessary not just to see what is in front of our eyes, but also to be able to compare that with what might be in front of our eyes.

• *The Fall into Consciousness*

Consciousness arises where it might make a difference — to be able to choose one's behaviour rather than to rely on instinctive reaction. Consciousness suspends instinct and looks for the possibility of better response.

The decisive act of consciousness is separation of subject from contents. Rational thought requires the drawing of clear distinctions, and the construction of a notional perspective unalloyed by prejudicial emotion. In myth, this is portrayed as the fall from lyrical innocence to prosaic struggle as the fundamental tone of life.

In the psychologically more developed version of the Fall recounted in the Qu'ran, it is the alienation of the chief angel, Iblis or Lucifer, from the human project that is at the root of the rebellion. Antipathy is the Original Sin, where God himself is put on trial by reason and found ambiguous. Reason is the adoption of the angelic position of being above and emotionally uninvolved in the quandaries of selfhood.

Freud showed how reason, when it is unbound from actuality and no longer fosters the development of moral character, betrays its barbaric ignorance of its own organic purpose in vicious unreason.

• *Mastering Oneself*

When consciousness is no longer the play of innocent empathy with instinctive antipathy, it cuts itself off from its own roots and becomes an ever more desperate attempt to hold back the tide of self-ambiguity. Pathological devaluation of affect — apathy — results from undigested antipathy, from inability to bear oneself.

This is where love begins — in self-relationship. Love means overcoming the excesses of self-absorption and polymorphous perversity in conscious acceptance of moral integrity. It is the step from mere reflexiveness to intelligence — from being determined by one's environment to determining oneself.

In short, the human begins to develop by recognising the freedom of a human being to behave in meaningful mutuality with the world and by resolving to take responsibility for the effects of our behaviour on our life-companions. In sympathy, we begin to realise that we share the ambiguous ontology of self with other beings.

In the loneliness of individuality, we recognise that we are the same as others in bearing the contradictory burdens of identity and uniqueness.

Love is a bridge across the abyss between the self as omnivalent and the self as futile; between the absolute existence and the absolute non-existence of the self. Heroic love is both the apotheosis and the demise of self. Magical love makes life a non-zero sum game, where everybody wins.

The alternative is apathy, which is an involuntary loss of meaning. If we take in something we are unable to digest, we get informational constipation. Apathy is the denial of, and closing off from, unresolvable feelings; sympathy is the acceptance of mutual need in unconditioned creative openness.

Spiritual love transcends empathy and antipathy in sympathy. This is the dialectic of redemptive compassion, liberation from untruth, return to unconditioned essence, the making of the true human.

The 18th Century Daoist Master, Liu I-Ming says, "Only great sages can change their temperament, while lesser people are bound by their temperaments; when they are run afoul of, the poison in their negative side acts, and they get excited — they contend for victory, eager for power, they plot and scheme to deprive others and benefit themselves. All such things that deviate from harmony and lose balance — arguments, battles of wits, issues of right and wrong — are called antagonism.

People who practise the Dao need to know that the disputatious nature of the temperament is most harmful. To practice the Dao in the context of the events of the world, first you must erase wile and impetuosity at a stroke. Be inwardly firm but not outwardly aggressive; then there may be danger in the environment but there is no danger in the heart... exercise caution and moderation so as to change your temperament... Should not those who practise the Dao contend with themselves first?"

• ***Idealism and Depression***

Idealism and depression are alike in that they are at root mentalistic phenomena. We talk ourselves into such emotional states in a degrading cycle of self-verifying postulates. Both states represent a denial of what is in favour of what ought to be (what must be soon, what can never be). At root, the only difference is that the idealist blames others for lack of fulfilment, while the depressive blames oneself. Abstract ideals must always be disappointed, so idealism and depression may be but different phases of the same process of mentalisation — devaluing the world in favour of ideas of the world.

Carl Jung described many forms of mental dysfunction in terms of what he called a 'complex', meaning an operational group of psychological processes which become internally self-referential and achieve a kind of quasi-independence of other functions and, indeed, of the world at large. The result is that the patient falls into a repetitive cycle of stereotypical behaviours divorced from context and apparent meaning. A neurosis becomes established and is frequently repeated exactly because it fails to satisfy the need by which it is driven.

By contrast, when Jung went on to explore the dimensions of psychological health rather than disease, he found that the healthy self-image was characterised as never complete, always coming into being, not something born fully-formed nor ever finished. The self is not an enclosed function of the individual psyche, rather it makes more sense to conceive of the psyche (mind or soul) as being an organ or field of manifestation of a greater inclusive identity. This is known as the 'mind of Dao,' or integral intelligence.

The evolution of this capacity is inherent in all mentality, of which the human mind is a species or phase of animality. Analogies fail, because there is nothing else in our experience that is like this blossoming in Reality. It is not conveyed by doctrine, it cannot be achieved by taking medicines or developed by ritual practices, it can never be proved.

The Dao is not a metaphysical proposition, it is the key to knowledge of actuality. Here it is, now.

• ***Certainty, Uncertainty and Faith***

Reality is constantly dissolving in itself. Binary 0s become 1s; 1s become 0s. Everything that exists is constantly emerging like bubbles in the quantum soup. To the degree that we are certain of our current location, we are uncertain of where we are going.

Always, what is is seeking to turn into what is not. Emptiness waits to be filled, fullness wants to be emptied. This self-dissolution (or, wanting to change into the opposite) is the eternal way of things — we may call it the Way (Dao), for want of any other name.

Rather than the one-dimensional perspective which does not know whether to call the bottle half-full or half-empty, the additional dimension of change allows us to see the bottle as either emptying or filling. In order to know where we are, we need to know where we have been and where we are going.

The danger is when we are unable to see where we are because we are still seeing where we were, or even that we are so lost in imagination that we cannot see where we are because we are possessed by our vision of the future, where we think we are going.

Daoist thought does not eschew ultimates but rather concentrates on their evidence in the immediacy of becoming. The present moment is the only locus of responsibility, the square centimetre chance of exercising freedom of will.

I can only know who I am by being aware of who I am presently becoming or changing into. Conversely, I can only be sure of my heading through deep self-knowledge of what I actually and potentially am. The two imperatives are not oppositional or exclusionary aspects, they only co-exist. There is no division in nature, only in thoughts and ideas.

The difference which might make a difference is the operation of consciousness. Consciousness means that my behaviour can no longer be determined solely by my history. I have the capacity to surprise myself — to realise what is innate in me and yet was formerly concealed by the circumstantial contingency of non-potentiality.

The 'wanting to change' that I have called Dao is, in fact, only the projection into two dimensions of the further perspective in which the course of my life extends as a continuous and yet continually evolving entity backwards into my past and

forward into my future. I observe that I have come from nothing and will necessarily return whence I came.

The essence of life is not in origin and destination — for they can only represent equilibrium states, which is to say, absence of life. Between non-being there becomes being. In between is the only game in town! Dao is the ungraspable totality of this process of identity, the course of life.

It is not some unfathomable origin of being (although it is that, actually); nor is it some fantastical mystery of ultimate fulfilment (although it is that, too). It is nothing but the very being of every moment of existence. It permeates, penetrates, mutates all that ever was or will be. Of such stuff are we animate beings composed. This is the Dao.

• ***The Dangers of Literalism***

The subtlety of Daoist thinking is because it focuses on function and is not misled by structural considerations. A favourite image is a ceramic pot — the clay gives it substance and form, but it is the space so formed that is useful as a container.

Literalism of any kind may prove deceptive. Laozi says, *"There are names but not nature in words."* The antidote to naive realism is to look at the multivalent processes of life rather than sticking at the superficial rationality of linguistically modulated appearance.

Laozi said, *"When foolish people hear of the Dao, they laugh. When ordinary people hear of the Dao, they try to understand what all this talk is about. When wise people hear of the Dao, they take it to heart, and bring it into their daily practice. If some did not laugh, it would not be the Dao."*

If the Daoist teachings seem perversely self-contradictory to the rational mind, this is not through wilful obscurity or deliberate mystification.

Daoism traces all confusion back to the misleading power of language. A noun is not just a grammatical construct, nor is it just a convenient way of referring to an actual object, it is also an operator in a world view that portrays the real world as composed of entities of which we may accurately speak using particular nominal referents.

A name invokes a linguistically conditioned system of classification of the universe. For linguistic purposes, consistency of meaning is essential. Every word we use cannot help being a cliché — a fossilised form of language associated with a range of conventional meanings and virtual referents.

"He who speaks does not know. He who knows does not speak."

He who speaks, but does not know, and he who knows, but does not speak, are the same he (i.e. anyone). It is perhaps like the two sides of the brain — one side specialising in physical and spatial knowledge and the other in abstract verbal representation of knowledge. The two sides are complementary in reality, not opposite in nature. When one side over-dominates, this causes dissension and imbalance.

We are unable to speak of what is really most important about our experience. All we can do is tell stories, to utilise the power of the collective imagination to put across what we are saying, what we are trying to say and what we are unable to say, yet means most. Language is a utilitarian construct and so there is good reason to believe it has evolved because it works. Instrumental concerns

are what are most easily articulated in words, and this appearance of clarity tempts us into regarding as important only what can be precisely and replicably defined. This is the heresy of science.

Laozi is at pains to help us to understand that it is in the ideas we have formed of ourselves and of our relationship with the world that our troubles begin. *"Have done with learning, sack the professors, and the people will return to good sense."* *"When rulers proclaim certainty in a loud voice, the people are thrown into doubt."*

The only route to understanding unbiased by misleading theories is through self-development.

This is what is meant by taking the Dao to heart and practising it diligently. Supply your own direct connection to the infinite and the metaphor of Dao makes sense. The human mind relaxes and emptiness of self is filled from the original source. Undoing the human mentality releases the virgin fecundity of unconditioned potential.

End and beginning are one, non-being turns constantly into being; being constantly returns to non-being. This movement relieves all stress, brings all potential to fruition, nurtures all seeds, recycles all nutrients. We are ecology, both personally and globally.

• **Sensing Truth**

Liu I-Ming says that to sense truth is to see with the eyes of the other.

"The other is another person, but it does not mean another person in the world — it means the original true person inherent in oneself." The emergence of this person into the world is through the 'mysterious pass'. *"Life is the primordial sane energy. Life is what is correct, what is correct is life. The correct standpoint, the proper position, is carefully preserving the sane energy in the mysterious pass."*

It is as if everything is both an object with identifiable attributes and, at the same time, an ineffable mystery beyond description or definition. If every object of perception has this property of complementary immanence and transcendence, how much the more so the factual mystery of one's own existence! I am what I am and what I have become.

If one holds to the very beginning of phenomenality, *"the human mentality will gradually depart and the temperament will gradually sublimate. Joining oneself to others, looking upon others and oneself as the same, there will be no discordant action."*

Discord arises in the human mentality when we are deceived by linguistic conceits into losing sight of the true integrity of the subject of our experience. When we see everything in terms of exclusive categories and oppositional tendencies, we are tempted to identify with one side and against the other. To dichotomise the world is to dichotomise one's self.

Language is the root of alienation. Through the narrational power of identity, the imagination begins to substantiate its speculations. The relational self dwindles into the background (the Freudian unconscious), as the rational self evolves through adaptation to the biosocial environment. Language allows the conscious to substantiate itself as the narrator of our personal history — to explain, justify and learn from the accidents of fate.

Naming confers power over things and over other people and thus over our own personal development. The unconditioned power to be becomes the power to be something, to name oneself, to be somebody.

Confused by the conceptual contradictions of our conditioning, we lose sight of what is original and precious in our life and take up arms against a threatening environment. We become like Hamlet, caught on the dilemma of our unresolvable rhetoric. In the paraphrase of Erich Fromm, "To have or to be, that is the question." Do we identify with what we have — what we have learned, what we possess — or with what we are — essentially fresh and as yet unformed? Being is about exchange, not accumulation. It is oriented to unfulfilled potential rather than being constrained by past achievement or failure.

"When the five elements are united and the five virtues conjoined, all entanglements dissolve and all that is good reaches the same goal." The moment of inclusive intelligence, of consciousness of reality unobscured by need, that is the Dao of the whole of creation.

The human mentality is no other than a mixed-up reflection of the mind of Dao. When there is no longer mixture but integrity of elements, confusion has no ground and illusions dissolve in universal compassion. This is the state of being known in the East as Buddha and in the west as Christos.

"The Dao that can be named is not the eternal Dao." What matters is not names, but the identity which the names conceal. We already possess the truth of eternal being — nothing else suffices. The teachings, Dharma and Gospels are all from one source and with one target — the moral heart of being, consciousness of integrity and immediate truth.

"No matter how far you think you have strayed, one step and you are back on the Way again, your path is return to the eternal."

• **Morality is Freedom**

"There is a deep-seated repugnance in the human breast against understanding the processes in which we are involved. Such understanding involves far too much responsibility for our actions."

Marshall McLuhan

Morality arises from understanding one's true relationship with reality. If one is not capable of understanding the consequences of one's actions and of evaluating the desirability of various alternative courses, then one is incapable of moral sense. Amorality is just as much a denial of responsibility as immorality precisely because it rejects the freedom to act as one should.

Morality is the freedom to choose the best action in all circumstances. It is the product of conscious application of commitment to benevolence in one's dealings with other inhabitants of our world. It is identical to the optimising faculty of intelligence, the ability to select behaviour that is most productive in each given circumstance.

The scope for optimisation can be fine-tuned by allowing response to the most subtle indications, happenings and phenomena, or it can be allowed to drift into disuse through mindless habituation. All ritual behaviour, however liberating when first experienced, carries the danger of apathy if it is repeated long enough. There can be no set prescriptions for the undefinable.

As members rather than observers of integral reality, true knowledge of the human situation is that which we know without reflection or consideration to be so. It is more like moral character than any kind of objective self-knowledge.

Discovering the 'meaning of life' involves 'thinking for oneself' and 'making up one's own mind' uninfluenced by preconception, opinion or prejudice. This is the same thing as constructing and being one's own meaning, discarding false reifications of emotional impressions. To 'be true to oneself' is only of value to the degree that one has realised what one must be true to.

Personal integrity draws no narrow boundaries. Liberation from falsehood is the path of development of humanity.

To take responsibility is the essential first step on the path of liberation through compassion. Freedom is belonging. The individual verifies and rectifies the unanimity of altruism, which is to say, the unreality of the separate ego and our identity with unbounded love and truth.

There is no freedom except in the integrity of the Whole; nothing to protect or defend save unbounded trust in the beauty of being. When the particle serves wholeheartedly, the particle dissolves in wholeness. *"The human mind departs and the mind of Dao alone is present."* (Liu I-Ming)

The secret of human-heartedness is idealism. Idealism releases soul-energy in your life. In essence, this is because the accustomed boundaries we put on our self-image — and thus of the scope of our possibilities for effective action — dissolve, and we act from a higher perspective on the significance of our life.

Conversely, depression (and other negative emotions) result from unfulfilled potential, misplaced idealism, powerlessness and the frustration of futile fantasies. The soul is hollow, depleted, apathetic — thrown back on its own inadequate and devalued resources. The cure for depression and the guarantor of effective unfanatical idealism is self-knowledge.

This is not abstract learning nor is it absorptive self-analysis. Laozi says, *"In the pursuit of learning, everyday something is acquired. In the pursuit of Dao, everyday something is lost."* The less one is in thrall to the imaginary or introjected self, the more one is free to identify with the true inclusive self of all being. Without true knowledge, change is only for the worse; with knowledge, where is there resistance to necessary change?

In growing knowledge of the Dao, Laozi goes on, *"Less and less is done until not-doing is achieved. When there is nothing left to do, nothing is left undone."*

The principle of *wu wei* (no to-do, no action) follows from the unreality of self-serving activity. There is no permanent identity save in the integrity of the whole — Dao alone is, so that the Dao of each person is identical to the Dao itself. The ordinary individual self is not a real entity in its own right — at best it is an instrumental fiction, an expedient social role or play-act.

Paradoxically, the ontological status of the self is yet more precious, for inwardly the self opens upon or instantiates the All-self, the guiding principle of intelligence. Understanding of this cannot come from outside or, indeed, be subject to outer validation. *"How do I know this?"* asks Laozi, " — *by this.*"

Daoism is a revealed religion only in this very literal sense — that the truth of Dao is open to self-verification to anybody who looks and understands what they see.

"One recognises the Universal Way and reaches the highest level of spiritual development through the effort of searching and the continual process of refinement. Because one's own developed spiritual capability is the better pilot of one's lifeboat, some may call this the Dao, yet the Universal Way is not a discovery or established doctrine."

Laozi, Hua Hu-Ching

• **Explanation and Understanding**

"There is nothing in the realm of ideas that is absolute and, because of this, all efforts to form ideologies are ultimately futile. Only by dissolving the mind can one connect with the great universal life."

In reality, everything is integral, because the Universal Way is the only way that exists. Duality is merely an illusory product of the mind. In order to perceive the integral reality of the universe, it is necessary to transcend the mental process of separation and fragmentation...

The integral mind knows that there is no self, that everything is One Self; thus it understands that if one does something outwardly to others, one in fact has done it inwardly to oneself."

Laozi, Hua Hu-Ching

Daoism is definitely not a religion in the Mosaic sense of submission to and worship of a jealous all-powerful God. Rather, as the name Dao — the Way — implies, it is a way of being in authentic relationship with the reality of truth. (In Chinese, the term Daoism is a solecism : Dao Dao, the way of the way).

The appeal is to self-evidence, that is to say to the evidence that the self to which we are so devoted is at once a fiction, a husk of not-being, and an artefact and participant in socioecological exchange of meaning.

Daoism teaches how to see with the twin perspective of process rather than the single greedy eye of material focus. To everything there is a complement or inversion into which it is constantly turning. It takes subtle insight and concentration to prehend the totality of this dynamic. Rigidity of all kinds is easily broken, only organic flexibility can absorb and dissipate energy without distress.

Daoism is not a materialist philosophy and yet it is the least other-worldly of the mystical paths. It is not that the mundane world is unreal by its plasticity, rather it is what we think of our relationship to the world that partakes of unreality.

It is this teaching that makes Daoism so relevant to the post-millennial era. Greater understanding of the science of ecology and of the nature of evolution — indeed of the very structure or, rather, process of matter — all reinforce and validate the premises of Daoism.

If intelligence means anything in human life, it seems reasonable that an intelligent person or society should live in accordance with their knowledge of their own nature. This implies a sincere seeking for self-correction as the very lifeblood of learning by being. *"The Dao is nothing if it is not everyday life."*

Daoist thought is aware of the distracting lures of fantasy and conjecture in shaping what we think we should believe in and how we should behave. The Memphis sage said it all, "Too much monkey business for me to be involved in." Which is to say, busywork for the vegetal brain, something you can do in your sleep. The Daoist practice is to turn consciousness back on itself, to return to the

source. If human consciousness is all we know, where does it come from? It applies itself to, but is not limited to two-legged life.

What the Daoist seekers of truth found was that what we call human consciousness is identical to the universal process of creation. Christian mystics have described this identity as the image of God.

The determinate surface reflects the indeterminate content, what the Daoists call 'the virginal uncarved block.'

If there is but one surface, one common world, still there are two orientations available, two sides to every argument — one which focuses on the material outcome, the other on the original intention. The mystical inclination finds no security in ever-changing phenomena and turns inward to the changeless root.

Conversely, if you always address the Superior Being who appears to you in the form of every supplicant for your attention, you will manifest your own higher self and will never lose the thread of Dao. Listening to your own inner teacher puts you in conversation with the guider to truth in every experience. To reach this happy state, one must possess freedom from imaginative conjecture and have found the essential point, the ecstatic instant, in openness and calm. Many by-ways, cul-de-sacs, loops and spirals lead off from this point, which Daoists call 'the mysterious pass' and identify with feminine receptivity.

It is not enough, as some scientists seem to believe, to be able to verbalise, to describe and name phenomena to explain why they occur and, most important, what their implications are for human behaviour.

Names and explanations of mechanisms describe concatenations of ideas. In the end they always prove to be circular and self-referential. Mathematically, any such system must be finite in extension, yet all our experience as sentient creatures points to infinities of interrelationship. I can never hope to understand myself in any mathematical sense — I elude my own gaze. Similarly, Laozi famously begins his classic exposition "*The Dao that can be named is not the eternal Dao.*" No closed system of precepts and explanations can encompass reality as she really is.

• *Yin and Yang*

Laozi said "*Be aware of your masculine nature, but by keeping to the feminine way, you shall become as a little child; and be to the world like a vessel in which the virtue eternal abides.*"

The terms translated as masculine and feminine refer to the projective and introjective modes of consciousness. Yang goes out to meet the world, yin takes the world in. Generally, yang is divergent, yin is convergent, and each both leads to and succeeds the other. These are complementary principles, equally and mutually necessary, not biological categories nor social conditions. Gender in this context is metaphorical, not hormonal or sociological. Yin and yang are integral to the internal constitution of all beings.

Laozi emphasises the priority of yang inclination, the innate bionomic libido or drive to remake the world in one's own image, but recommends maintenance of yin attitude and absorption of experience — to image oneself on the unimaginable Integral One.

Our masculine (yang) nature is, as it were, to the virtualisation of experience, whereas the feminine (yin) way is to the actualisation of experience. The intercourse between these exclusive yet reciprocal polarisations produces the

zygote of immortality, the child of the mutual response of spirit to matter and matter to spirit.

Rejection of matter in the name of spirit is itself a betrayal of spirit.

Incommensurate though the respective dimensions be, it is mere ignorance to divorce one from the other. It is in the nature of matter to be resistant, concrete and persistent; in the nature of spirit to be independent of circumstance, evanescent and insubstantial; but both, not either on its own, are in the nature of existence. Matter is bound by repetition and reinforcement; spirit leaps every gulf, favouring innovation and uniqueness; neither makes sense on its own. Matter is spiritualised and spirit materialised by life.

The mythographer Joseph Campbell sees the symbolic difference between feminine and masculine experience as being founded on the female biology of menstruation, pregnancy and childbirth. Women have to recognise the facts of life as practically operative, indeed as more than mere theoretical facts but as a developmental challenge to one's very concept of oneself as simultaneously person and organism.

Our yang (or instrumental) nature identifies the world we experience. Which is to say, breaks up incomprehensible wholeness into bits, parts and pieces, processes and structures, objects and relationships between objects. Without this analytical intelligence, there would be no point to life - at the most basic level, how long would a creature survive that could not learn the difference between food and not-food?

Conversely, what good would food knowledge be without the desire and ability to dissolve the intellectual distinction between food and not-food to the extent of taking food into the first thing we ever identified as not-food i.e. our own body?

The point is not trivial, for in a very real sense we feed on information in order to develop a body of knowledge we call by our own name. This is the original sense of the saying, "You are what you eat!"

The masculine nature wants to remould the world in its own invented image. The feminine way is to accept the world into itself, to nurture oneself on reality, to en vessel truth.

The deeper meaning is that the masculine nature represents freedom and indeterminacy — which requires the exercise of feminine responsibility and determination for its substantiation in truly creative behaviour. The child of this conjunction of complementary functions is a productive process of remaining close to the original inspiration in careful economy of clarifying action.

Laozi said, "The Way and its virtue are means of mutual life-giving and nurturing, means of mutual developing and maturing, means of mutual closeness and love, means of mutual respect and honour.

Even the ignorant do not harm those they love. If you could truly have all the people of the world embosom a heart of human love, where would calamity come from?"

Wen Tzu ch. 86

• ***The Nature of Intelligence, the Intelligence of Nature***

Life is a process, a Way, a journey of return. Everything has its cycle of development, from the rich potential of its birth point, through the crises and evolutions of its maturity, to its decay and reabsorption into the system of which it has always been a part.

Continuity and change are the fundamental facts of life. The Yi Jing says, *"Increase comes about through favouring the good and rejecting the bad"*. This is the basal intelligence that directs all organic growth — which is a recognition fully in accord with the Neo-Darwinian understanding of biological evolution. Success builds upon success and learns from failure. Organisms that fit their environment thrive, while maladaptations are pruned by lack of sustainability. Intelligence preserves continuity by adapting to change.

Good and bad equate to what is presently or possibly useful versus what is actually or potentially harmful. Take to the useful and repel the harmful and the world's your oyster! The issue is, useful to what?

Beyond mere survival as an end in itself, the issue — what are we born for? — and therefore the use to which we devote our efforts — must be a matter of evolving cultural emphasis and individual exploration and development. No definitive answer is possible or necessary.

Morris Berman explains Gregory Bateson's ideas on the immanence of mind as follows, *"The ecosystem, in short, is rational (in the sense of being reasonable) and there is no violating its rules without suffering certain consequences. In pitting his own survival against the survival of the rest of the ecosystem, in adopting the Baconian programme of technological mastery, Western man has managed, in a mere three centuries, to throw his own survival into question. The true unit of survival and of Mind, is not organism or species, but organism + environment, species + environment. If you choose the wrong unit, and believe it is all right to pollute Lake Erie until it loses its Mind, then you will go a little insane yourself, because you are a sub-Mind in a larger Mind that you have driven a bit crazy."*

The Dao of heaven has no contrivance. With nothing to prove, there is no claim of possession. Owning nothing is called belonging nowhere. Belonging nowhere, there is no reason to tarry. Having nowhere to go, there is no reason to hurry. With no clinging to action, everything is accomplished without anxiety.

• ***Self-knowledge***

"To know you are ignorant is already truth." There is a seeking — and the finding is mutual. Laozi says, *"Without leaving your room, you may know the whole world. Without looking through your window, you may see the ways of heaven. The further you go, the less you know."*

All knowledge is in the end self-knowledge. I look into things and find out about them because they draw and reward my interest. This is the ecological principle of niche, as set out in hexagram 45 of the Yi Jing, "Gathering Together : if you wish to understand the nature of any being, observe what it gathers together." I am my own complement. I enfold my world in my own particular way (Dao). This is not separate from, or other than, 'the' Dao, rather how I express my own angle or view of the whole. There could be no separate consciousness of this enfolding or virtual entirety. Every chard is a chip off the virginal block.

Laozi says *"The way is broad, but people keep wandering off on side-tracks. If I have just a little sense, I will walk on the main road, and my only fear will be of straying from my route."*

Self-knowledge implies, necessitates and promotes spiritual development, which is to say, to heal the damaged sense of self ('I') and reintegrating the person into the totality of existent being.

"Human life in the world has a mission, which alone is important; with this direction there is life, without it there is death. If one cannot find happiness in this mission, this direction, this order, everything else is empty and false. That to which heaven [original nature] directs humanity is only good; if one can find happiness in that command, then this is obeying heaven. Obeying heaven is the way to obey the command [of one's own real nature]; finding happiness in the celestial mandate is the way to find happiness in heaven."

Liu I-Ming on hexagram 14 ䷌ 'Great Possession'
'The Taoist I Ching' tr. Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1986

The Daoist direction is returning to the infinitude of primordality — for that is the only possession of value, the treasure of eternal renewal of being. The way of heaven is bringing out what was hidden, the way of earth is hiding what was formerly visible, the way of the human is healing entropic damage — which is to say, overcoming the illusion of time in the vision of completeness. The benefit from pursuit of this mission is incalculable, for it is the removal of all insufficiency from intelligence.

Seen as a process rather than as a fixed state or condition, addressing insufficiency is like a process of emptying, in readiness to be filled. The need for fulfilment is not to be denied — indeed, the more we are aware of the real potential of our need, the readier we are to recognise and accept deep (and perhaps surprising) fulfilment of sufficiency.

Observation of the dynamics of our biological organisation and its interaction with our social roles and concerns is necessary to cultivate the complementary senses of concentration and insight to descry our own best interest. Logically and existentially, insofar as we derive and share our life with a rich and complex ecology to which we belong, our own best interest is precisely the best interest of the whole process or system of being.

This is known as 'Following the Dao' and is identical to following one's own Dao and walking the Dao of humanity, the path between heaven and earth. We may also identify this process as balancing the sides of one's natural constitution.

It is as if one saw one's life as a series of points along a line. The first step in the formation of a consistent sense of self is the realisation of connections between points of oneself separate in time. Furthermore, it is as if at first each successive point were so different from the preceding point that my sense of self were continually expanding to encompass more aspects of my developing interaction with my environment.

This is the process we know as childhood, characterised by organic growth. However, the reflexiveness of our constitution is such that, at a certain stage, we begin to find more and more structural consistencies between each point of self-reflection — not necessarily between sequential states of self-disposition, but between a present or recent disposition and a previous similar experience.

After a period of such recognitions, it might come to be that we become to be more focused on the continuity and consistency of our self-reflections than on the exciting novelty of fresh experiences and emotions. This is the process of consolidation we know as adulthood, increasingly characterised by loss of faculty.

There is nothing perpetual in human experience save the perpetuity of change. To understand the changes is to begin to identify with what is unchanging. Jesus said "*Who seeks to save his life shall lose it.*" Insufficiency belongs solely to the fictional or imagined instrumental self; in reality there is no insufficiency. To seek to hold on to the mundane self is to elevate convenience above principle, to prefer non-being over being, to limit knowledge by ignorance, to become the victim of entropy.

The implication is clear — to identify solely with one's body is to contemplate more or less imminent disintegration. The teaching of Daoism is that there is a higher continuity of identity, of which the individual human being is a volatile and transient reflection. To identify with this mystery is the only realistic option open to sentient and conscient intelligence. All teachings, religions and philosophies are means to this goal.

• ***The Dangers of Ideology***

To be certain what we are is a sorry state, for it limits future potential to what is already past. The known or definable truth is always a linguistic construct, since all it provides is a mapping of our command of language and the categorical application of this to our experience.

"*There are names but not nature in words.*" The first essential step is to release our original nature from the names to which we have become programmed to respond. This is how I interpret the injunction of Jesus, "*First seek the kingdom of heaven... [which] is within you.*" This point of essential indetermination is what we are which is independent of all categorisation. Understanding our own transcendence from logical delineation is the touchstone of all spiritual knowledge.

God is like me, before I become my (most undivine) prosaic self. God is me before I become what I apparently am. The Mind of Dao is what remains when the human mind departs and I cease to be just me. What is this me that must disappear? It is no more than the fallacious idea of myself I once held, in ignorance of my true nature. It is like redeeming a pawn ticket and reclaiming once more the treasure of your birthright, which you had traded for a mess of potage.

This is the Daoist teaching of *wu wei* (not-doing). The human being is a plastic vessel whose shape is moulded by the interplay of internal and external pressures. If the internal force is too high, the bubble which is only finitely elastic must eventually burst. If the internal force is not sufficient then the vessel is constrained by environmental pressure and shrinks into flaccidity. In any event, while the semi-permeable membrane persists, the surface is a contingent resultant whose topology is determined by the deceptive complexity of happenstance.

• ***The Science of Dao***

Far from disproving Daoist metaphysics, or disposing of it as irrelevant — as scientific thinking claims of other forms of spiritual realisation — 20th Century science has done much to elicit the nature of the evolutionary mechanisms involved.

For instance, quantum mechanics has identified the principle of uncertainty as governing our interaction with the world at its most fundamental level. If we grasp at detail, we lose touch with principial probability; if we cling to principle, we lose touch with the grain of actuality. Complementarity is the Great Idea of Daoism as of modern physics.

With growing knowledge of the quantum and relativistic physics of existence and of the self-organising biochemistry and ecological dynamics of evolution, the unitary or field model of living systems is coming to the fore of our intellectual consideration - our model of 'the way things really are'. This is the fundamental meaning of the term Dao, complete with the built-in evolutionary perspective which is only now coming to emerge as a dominant theme of Western intellectual philosophy.

Conversely, Daoism offers a means to heal the unnatural divide between Natural Philosophy (what we now call the Sciences) and Moral Philosophy (what we used to call the humanities and now, broadly, the Arts and Social Sciences), and thus to recover an essential but sorely frayed thread in Western cultural development.

What it means to be alive is the heart blood of culture — and it is to the working out of this enigma that cultural creativity is directed. The recantation of Galileo stands as the definitive moment in the historical Western schism between fact and value. In appeasement of the then temporal as well as spiritual power of the Otherworldists, the scientist agrees to confine his attention to facts which do not impinge on the moral values of the dominant culture. In compromise, the Church — which openly despises the ways of this world — agrees to permit limited factual scientific investigation, provided the scientist keeps well away from any moral, social or metaphysical interpretation — values are consigned to the other world where the churchman thinks they belong and about the existence of which the scientist doesn't know and doesn't care.

Daoist mysticism is not of the otherworldly theological variety which has so alienated many in the scientific community — and tempted them to the risible claim that science can, indeed, should be in some sense 'value-free'. This claim belittles the moral dimension inherent in the scientific method.

It does no justice to the true scientific disposition to cut its practitioners off from the moral issues raised by their own findings. Per contra, any attempt to limit the moral accountability of the scientific enterprise to the social community in which it participates and thrives, convicts science at its own hand of the very high-handedness which scientists condemn in the claim of the truths of revealed religion to be beyond scientific investigation.

The whole evolutionary process of creation is in the compassionate engagement of the universal spirit with the plenary particularities of its contingent realisation. There is no need for appeal to the supernatural in Daoism. The teachings of Laozi, the legendary (some would say mythical) founder of Daoism, are not prophecies invoking divine sanction for their origin. Laozi asks himself "*How do I*

know this?" and answers, *"By this..."* Correspondingly, proof of the reality of the Way does not require a leap of faith, only accurate and honest self-verification. It is not so much that we are capable of transcending our limited frame of self-reference, as that we are capable of dropping the pretence of knowing better. The transcendent is real and pervasive; mundanity is a self-imposed and therefore fragmentary and volatile imaginal construct.

Although not scientific in itself, this approach complements scientific objectivity with radical spiritual openness and intellectual self-doubt.

- ***Wholeness and the Implicate Order***

"The principal feature of the mechanistic order is that the world is regarded as constituted of entities which are outside of each other, in the sense that they exist independently in different regions of space (and time) and interact through forces that do not bring about any changes in their essential natures. The machine gives a typical illustration of such a system of order. Each part is formed (e.g. by stamping or casting) independently of the others, and interacts with the other parts only through some kind of external contact. By contrast, in a living organism, for example, each part grows in the context of the whole, so that it does not exist independently, nor can it be said that it merely 'interacts' with the others without itself being essentially affected in this relationship..."

"The theory of relativity was the first significant indication in physics of the need to question the mechanistic order. ...it implied that no coherent concept of an independently existing [elementary] particle is possible, neither one in which the particle would be an extended body, nor one in which it would be a dimensionless point. Thus, a basic assumption underlying the generally accepted form of mechanism in physics has been shown to be untenable.

"To meet this fundamental challenge, Einstein proposed that the particle concept no longer be taken as primary, and that instead reality be regarded from the very beginning as constituted of fields. ...the idea of a separately and independently existing particle is seen to be, at best, an abstraction furnishing a valid approximation only in a certain limited domain..."

"The quantum theory presents a much more serious challenge to the mechanistic order ... the interaction between different entities constitute a single structure of indivisible links, so that the entire universe has to be thought of as an unbroken whole. In this whole, each element that we can abstract in thought shows basic properties that depend on its overall environment, in a way that is much more reminiscent of how the organs constituting living beings are related, than it is of how parts of a machine interact."

'Wholeness and the Implicate Order' by David Bohm
(Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1980)

Bohm goes on to make the essential point that, under the prevailing mechanistic approach, the task of science is to start from isolated independent parts and to derive the properties of all wholes through abstraction, explaining them as the results of interactions of the parts, whereas the new paradigm requires that we start from the undivided wholeness of the universe, deriving the parts from abstraction from the whole, explaining them as [only] approximately separable, stable and recurrent, externally related elements making up relatively autonomous sub-wholes.

"...one finds, through a study of the implications of the quantum theory, that the analysis of a total system into a set of independently existent but interacting particles breaks down in a radically new way. One discovers, instead, both from consideration of the meaning of the mathematical equations and from the results of actual experiments, that the various particles have to be taken literally as projections of a higher-dimensional reality which cannot be accounted for in terms of any force of interaction between them."

• **Quantum Fields**

To see things only in terms of generalities is to miss the significance of the particular; to see only particularities is to be unable to generalise from experience. Western science has come to identify this nexus at the fundament of all material existence in the discovery of the principle of uncertainty. Also known as the principle of complementarity, this refers to the fact that the basic physical entities are so constituted as to appear only as waves in one set of experimental conditions and only as particles in the complementary set of circumstances. The importance of this unexpected discovery cannot be overestimated.

The quantum degree of freedom between field function and instantiation (between wave and particle) can be applied directly to the human Dao. The incommensurate integrity of attitude with behaviour is known as fulfilling the Dao.

Stephen Hawking gives a lucid metaphor for the quantum field function, *"An electron orbiting around the nucleus could be thought of as a wave, with a wavelength that depended upon its velocity. For certain orbits, the length of the orbit would correspond to a whole number (as opposed to a fractional number) of wavelengths of the electron. For these orbits, the wave crest would be in the same position each time round, so the waves would add up : these orbits would correspond to allowed orbits."* Where harmonic resonance is not reinforced, any other orbit would be not so much disallowed as self-cancelling.

The New Age concept of 'vibrations' is the application of the same metaphorical principle to the fields of humanity, which is to say to fields of meaning potential. Stephen Hawking expresses a certain, or uncertain, faith that the human phenomenon may be explicable in terms of quantum physics; the universal humanist knows — needs no justification by faith or prediction — that quantum physics is an expression of human potential for discovery of meaning. The Daoist identifies this principle as the underlying ever-fertile ground of existence.

The intelligence of Dao is the principle of cognateness, literally 'being born together'. In the evolving language of quantum physics, this is known as the non-locality of quantum events. Every instantiation of quantum (measurable) materiality involves the so-called collapse of the wave function. This function describes the field of probability of the occurrence of an observation of a particle-like (i.e. local) object anywhere in the universe.

Over unimaginably small (but still measurable) moments of time-space, it seems that the principle of conservation of energy may be momentarily inapplicable. A whole series of virtual particles may appear out of nothing before collapsing back into converse nullity.

In this view, the whole universe may represent a momentary bubble of improbability. Some theorists, indeed, have postulated an infinitude of these

bubble universes, since every event instantiates only one probability out of a range. An alternative theory sees a kind of Darwinian selection taking place, in effect filtering out uninteresting possibilities while multiplying improbabilities. Whatever the true (verifiable, measurable) explanation, it is significant that the mystery which confronts the theoretical physicists is precisely the issue that sparks off all metaphysical speculation and is addressed by all religious thought. In short, it is the sheer improbability of conscious existence.

The Daoist, as ever, prefers to describe rather than speculate — *"Out of non-being, being; out of being, non-being."* We use language to try to express the inexpressible — is this not simply the articulation of the power and limits of verbalisation? *"There are names but not nature in words. If you stick to verbal facility, you see only the surface of things; if you free yourself from attachment to names, you may penetrate to the mystery at the heart of things."* What can originated beings like ourselves — which, having a beginning, must surely have an end — know of the uncreated source of all this coming and going?

The Sufis have a saying, "Christians have the symbol of the Cross; we have the reality." The cross is too rectilinear a symbol to appeal to the organic aesthetics of the Daoist, but the exegesis of the crucifix from a Daoist perspective is clear. The way of heaven is represented by the vertical strut, the breadth of the way of earth by the horizontal. Nor does the notion of the way of humanity as crucifixion on this device appeal to Daoists or Muslims, although it has echoes in the Buddhist doctrine of redemption through compassionate suffering and in the Norse myths of Loki hanging on the world tree.

With the higher Christian interpretation, no seeker of whatever faith or fealty could dispute — the interpenetrability of the Divine being with the mundane is at the root of all spirituality. The realisation of this mystery is indeed of extreme importance — to the borders of death and beyond. The knowledge of higher intelligence at work is the primordial birthright, recollection of which does involve the death (sacrifice = making holy) of the mundane self and resurrection of the divine.

"Emptying the human mind to seek the Dao, the repentant can be freed from regret. The mind of Dao is the ally of the human mind, which can reform the artificiality of the human mind as easily as biting through skin....even though the human mind is the chief of villains, it is also chief in merit; it is not an enemy but a partner. Once the human mind is seen and the mind of Dao is restored, at this point if you empty the human mind and activate the mind of Dao, then yin and yang [convergence and divergence] combine harmoniously. It is like encountering rain, which washes away the filth of all the pollution of the past, so one is restored to original wholeness and soundness."

Liu I-Ming, commentary on hexagram 38 ䷥ 'Disharmony'
'The Taoist I Ching', tr. Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1986

The more deeply individualised our experience, the more we touch universal themes. This is the essence of unanimity — the individual encapsulates as well as being environed by the universe. Higher intelligence is when you see clearly what you must do, unblinkered by personal petty concerns. This is the real you, authentic and original, the very breath of the spirit on the waters of materiality. Just as Jesus was asked in whose name he forgave sins, so Laozi replies, *"How do I know this? By this..."* Realisation of the truth is realisation of impartiality.

In the end, partial concerns (like Hawking's quantum non-orbits) are self-consuming rather than self-developing. Conversely, we find true authenticity of being when we are pursuing the spontaneous renewal of interest and fascination open to the clear eye. This is more a matter of concentration than detachment, of insight rather than sentimental abandon. Laozi compares this state of being to the delicate and supple breathing of a new-born infant, or to the fullness of attention and lack of perturbation of an ideal concubine.

• ***Inherency, Identity, Integrity***

The three 'I's of the New Age vision are Inherency and Integrity and the third or virtual person, Identity.

Inherency refers to the inwardness of all being in intimate belonging with what one is.

Integrity refers to the outwardness of phenomenal ecology.

Identity is the intersection and realisation of the outward and the inward.

Identity is contingent, but inherency and integrity are fundamental and indivisible functions of all conscious existence. This is the same principle as wave-particle duality at the quantum level and energy-entropy complementarity at the thermodynamic level. Neither pole is reducible to the exclusion of its opposite, what applies is the field of potential opened up. Laozi said "*Clay makes the sides of the cup, yet it is the emptiness thus enclosed that is useful.*" The clinging together of the ceramic particles leaves room for what really matters.

The neural cells of the brain are inherent each in their own place responding according to their nature; mind is the integration of this network of neural activity; identity the resultant evolving person of the whole.

• ***Taking over Evolution***

In the esoteric schools of Daoism, the development of intelligence is known as 'usurping creation.' Thomas Cleary (introduction to 'The Taoist I Ching') glosses this as "*taking over evolution*"; "*recovering autonomy, becoming free from the compelling force of habituation, and taking the initiative in continuing conscious development unhindered by the limitations of personality or culture. This is the work of creating the 'new human.'*"

The process whereby the embryo of the true human being is cultivated is known as "*living midnight*" : "*The state of mental quiescence combined with keen awareness, threshold of the dawn of the awakening of original mind after the acquired mentality is silenced.*"

• ***Change and the Unchanging***

The 13th Century Daoist master, Li Daoqun, taught that complete reality includes that which never changes with that which is always changing. Although these aspects seem contradictory, they are from one source. We might say that unchangingness is the inwardness of creation and change its outwardness. This is like the way the brain works — it has to ignore the constant background in order to respond to environmental changes, phenomena, objects and events.

The ground state cannot itself be perceived as an object of thought, but everything that happens is like a fluctuation of or from that state, which may perhaps be identified with what physicists call the 'quantum vacuum,' which is strictly speaking not a vacuum or nothingness but a plenum or everythingness.

Everything that exists is an expression of the plenary non-conditioned, changing in function but not substance. It is impossible to observe creation from the outside, since there is no outside.

Stephen Hawking refers to this paradox in the very title of his book, 'A Brief History of Time.' Logically, there cannot have been a time before time began, so to refer to time as having a history is a physicist's joke. The theory of the 'Big Bang,' with which time 'began' is another rather esoteric joke, referring to the mathematical singularity which is as far as we can look back into the past. In reality, there was nothing for this initial singularity to explode into, since space has only existed 'since' the big unfoldment began. The whole universe of space and time is like a bubble of existence, still bounded by the impenetrable cosmic singularity.

Daoists call the unchanging unconditioned ground of being, 'Essence' and the field of cause and effect, 'Life.' Everything that we encounter is part of life, nothing exists outside the continuum of change, but this is still no more than the surface of reality. To understand what underlies endless phenomenality, it is necessary to know by essence. Master Li prescribes *"freedom from cogitation and contrivance."*

"There has never been anything that waxed without waning. Those who realise this are clearly aware of truth... What is silent and unstirring is spirit, what is sensitive and effective is potential..."

When the mind is clear and freed of preoccupations, it is possible to fathom the design of reality; when thoughts are ended and feelings forgotten, it is possible to fathom the essence of reality. When selfishness and desire disappear, it is possible to arrive at the Dao; when one is plain and simple, pure and whole, it is possible to know the celestial..."

Change and movement have their times; safety and danger are in oneself. Calamity and fortune, gain and loss, all start from oneself. Therefore those who master change are those who address themselves to the time. For those who address themselves to the time, even danger is safe; for those who master change, even disturbance is orderly..

Others benefit those who benefit others; others help those who help others; others trust those who trust others; others are generous to those who are generous to others."

The Book of Balance and Harmony of Li DaoQun
translated by Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1991

Rational thought, epitomised by the musings of the 20th Century physicist, is exhausted before it can see through the veil of reality. The more elaborate its contrivance, the more evident the self-referentiality of the products of cogitation to the unbiased intelligence.

"Inwardly, freedom from cogitation and contrivance; outwardly sensitive adaptation. Doing comes from non-doing."

The Dao stands for that natural self-organising intelligence that underlies and produces everything in creation. It is also based on a frank acknowledgement that what we are pleased to prize as human consciousness is an evolved adaptation. It is by no means certain or complete as a guide to what the world really is, indeed least of all to an understanding of its own function in the creation of the universe.

What reason does is to construct an imaginary model of the world, then to test this description against what we would expect to observe if the model were not untrue. The brain is an evolutionary organ — its function is to optimise its possessor's chances of survival. What confers advantage is knowing what comes next. Intelligence in this sense may be defined as appropriate response to the challenges of life.

• ***Comprehension of Life***

Liu I-Ming defines Daoism thus:

"The sages' science of fulfilment of nature in comprehension of life" and its method as "thorough investigation of principle."

The student must begin by learning to distinguish the higher from the lower, above from below. These are not material distinctions, or even ideological. Rather, higher = inclusive = unitive; lower = exclusive = divisive. The distinctions between things lie in their differences, but from a higher perception it is in their similarities due to essential unity. Differences are transient, unity is constant.

The higher includes the lower, the lower excludes the higher. It is a matter of intelligence rather than morality, of understanding the way things are and therefore behaving in harmonic unity with one's environment.

Liu I-Ming calls the principle of celectiality "true sense." When true sense is always present, one's attention is not swayed by arbitrary feelings and one can exercise firm strength in proper balance. The emphasis is always on the present moment : "The Dao is meaningless if it is not everyday life."

To live in the present in full awareness of timeless principle is to open one's everyday life up to the celestial. Lower and higher are not in opposition but in their proper mutual complementarity and reciprocation.

"When the celestial and earthly elements in humans commune, everything is at peace." This is a dynamic state, defined by Master Liu as "a natural course, which does not require forced effort, this is called following the way of nature"

This is known as the Way of Immortality, for to devote one's life to the undying spirit is to walk with the Immortals, to achieve the completest human stature. In all things there is a passing away and a coming to be. It is only sensible to identify with what endures through all changes and let what passes, pass.

Personal immortality means something different to the Daoist from what is understood in the Western tradition. It does not refer to the persistence of an individual self beyond the grave. On the contrary, it refers to the immediate dissolution of self in the immortal essence of all being.

Laozi says, "*The Way is gained by daily loss.*" The Daoist seeks to identify with eternal principles in everyday consciousness and practice. What is eternal is independent of any circumscription, it is timeless and pervasive. In this is access to immortality through the cultivation of benign intention with lack of presumption.

The most fleeting thing in creation is the momentary configuration of neural firing in a human brain. Ideas can and do change faster than any other organic function.

The virtual model of the world in a brain, no matter how sophisticated, informed and enlightened its possessor, is in the end no more than a depleted representation of the majesty and mystery of the uncategorisable Whole.

• **Particulars of the Universal**

The Truth is the inheritance of all beings. Although truth by its universality transcends circumstance, it is the reality of all particularities and, as such, is not essentially compromised by its engagement with mundanity, provided this relationship is understood properly. Truth is unlimited while understanding is contingent on perspective, experience and knowledge. The movement or Way of creation is the particularisation of the universal; the Way of return (the Way of completion or the path of the sage) is the universalisation of the particular. This is the human niche par excellence, the fulfilment of the ecological and spiritual function of moral being.

"Followers of the Dao should not fail to assimilate to others, yet should not be too like others either. If they do not assimilate, they will startle and amaze the ignorant and ordinary people, and will be disliked and suspected by others; if they become too similar, however, they will be caught up in their influence and fall into mundane feelings. Therefore they are different in the midst of sameness.

Emulating the way moisture permeates things, they merge with the ordinary world and harmonise their illumination, responding to people harmoniously, able to adapt without restriction, assimilating to everyone. Emulating the way fire lights things up, they clearly distinguish truth and falsity, dealing with people without confusion, inwardly autonomous, having extraordinary self control. Outwardly the same yet inwardly not the same, inwardly different yet outwardly indistinguishable, they are thus able to be very much like others while at the same time very much different from other people. Outward sameness means going by worldly law [and the mutual dependence of people on each other], inward independence is practising the principles of Dao. This is what is meant by the teaching, 'In cultivating practice, one conforms and harmonises, adapting to each individual situation as it is; nobody can fathom such changes, nor see how one acts or lies hidden.'"

Commentary on hexagram 38 ('Disparity') of the Taoist I Ching
Liu I-Ming, 1796, translated by Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1986

In other words, following the Dao is not a matter of subscribing to a defined set of ideas; It is a process of realigning one's internal attitude and external behaviour to harmonise with and reinforce the necessary comprehensiveness of human evolution. Laozi says, *"People think that someone who can conquer others is strong, but I say the truly strong person is the one who can subdue himself."*

The Daoist sage is neither priest nor demagogue; he or she is someone not ruled by either emotion or opinion. The state of sagehood is not gained by learning or belief; it is based neither on analysis nor faith; it is not the result of intellectual qualification, nor of supernatural beneficence. Rather, it is the natural state of humanity, and those who follow the Way of Life - the Dao - are entitled to the definitive accolade of Real People. We might say, people who have realised their reality, and found it to be no other than the one Reality of all existence. Real People are not constrained by the pretended objectivity of the scientist - always

outside their own frame of understanding - nor by the doubts of religious believers in the truth of the evidence of their own experience. The behaviour of Real People is liberated from artifice, they need to practise neither science nor religion. They look to the integral spirit and are not blinded by conditioned ignorance or partiality of any kind.

• **Integral Truth**

"Attachment to false images of the mind is the greatest obstacle to reaching awareness of integral truth...to believe in the reality of images is equal to believing in the unreality of images. Both are mere concepts which separate one from direct intuitional contact with the integral truth. To know the truth is to know nothing, yet when one knows the truth, there is nothing one is not aware of.

To have whole vision is to have no vision of anything in particular, yet there is nothing that can escape one's discernment. People who are unenlightened have not yet reached integral truth, for they cannot direct their mental energy to flow in the right channel. Instead, they adhere to totally false, rigidly formed belief systems that are composed of concepts derived from the limited sensory organs. This distorted information is stored and arranged by the memory and judgement systems. Thus, the more one knows and understands, the more dimness and confusion are created. One is continually bewildered by what one knows and sees...The mind clings to the false images it creates. All of this conditioning builds up layer upon layer of conceptual filters through which one then looks at the world. Thus, not only is one's conception of the world distorted by the interposition of these false images, but one's very being becomes distorted, This adds further hindrance to reaching integral truth.

...it only aggravates the situation further to do anything to eliminate the vexations of the mind. In the process of working to eliminate mental vexation, more trouble and further separation are created. This prevents one from getting in touch with one's true being and from moving forward toward the integral reality of the universe. The movement created by the attempt to eliminate mental vexation, such as turning to religion for help or escape, is just another deviation from the correct channel in which one's mental energy should flow. If, at this moment, one does not become attached to what one sees and knows, one can uncover one's true insight and thereby see through the illusory situations of life. Actually, attachment is the separation from the wholeness of truth. Theological promises, the appearance of life and death and all human activities are fruitless compared to the integral truth.

When one dissolves the illusion of separation from the source of Universal Mind, one restores one's own original, pure mind. It is the accumulation of dust and dirt, gathered while living in the world, that prevents one from truly experiencing the fullness of life. Once the dust and dirt are cleansed away, one suddenly becomes brilliantly illumined with the awareness of integral unity. It is not by creation or design that one can enjoy awareness of oneness with the subtle cosmic body, but only through the direct experience of the Universal Way of life.

Nor can one experience the [Dao] by fastening oneself to anything the mind creates, but only by following the Universal Way can one see and know correctly. Clarity and enlightenment are brought about without one's having to move an inch, for the integral truth is only found within one's own true nature."

Hua Hu Ching - The Later Teachings of Lao Tzu,

• **The Life of Meaning**

"There is life which consists of a quantity of energy and there is life which consists of the meaning of the Dao. The life which is a quantity of energy is created by the universe, and is conditioned; the life of the meaning of Dao creates the universe, and is primordial."

Liu I-Ming

If we are to regain our birthright of full humanity and participate as we should in the joy of universal fellowship and mutual creativity of evolution, we have to liberate ourselves from the structured ignorance we have weighted ourselves down with, we have to leave behind the baggage of modernity.

The meaning of Dao is open to all, for it is not a metaphysical recipe or faith or belief system, but as near as each of us can get to the integrity of primordial nature in our own life, mind and heart. The condition for entry to this path is self-acceptance, the reward for progress is self-transcendence, the goal is unadulterated Reality untainted by considerations of self.

Laozi describes the way of those who have realised the truth,

"There is no knowledge without Real People... They are virtuous who close their senses, put away their aspirations and intentions, cast off their intellectual brilliance and return to a vastness where there is no conscious knowing, meander beyond the dust and dirt, roam in the realm where there is nothing of concern, drink in darkness and spew out light, and harmonise with all beings and all things..."

Those whom we call sages rest peacefully in their places according to the time and enjoy their work as appropriate to the age. Success and happiness are deviations from virtue, likes and dislikes are a burden to the mind, joy and anger are excesses on the way.

Therefore their birth is the action of heaven, their death is the transformation of things.

When still, you merge with the quality of darkness; when active, you are on the same wave as light.

So mind is the master of form, spirit is the jewel of mind.

Sages... do not dare to be excessive. They use non-being to respond to being and are sure to find out the reason; they use emptiness to receive fullness and are sure to find out the measure. They pass their lives in peaceful serenity and open calm, neither alienating anyone nor cleaving to anyone.

Embracing virtue, they are warm and harmonious, thereby following heaven, meeting with the Dao and being near to nature. They do not start anything for profit nor initiate anything that would cause harm. Death and life cause no changes in the self, so it is called most spiritual. With the spirit, anything that is sought can be found and anything that is done can be accomplished...

As to the roaming of sages, they move in utter emptiness, let their minds meander in the great nothingness; they run beyond convention and go through where there is no gateway. They listen to the soundless and look at the formless; they are not constrained by society and are not bound to its customs...

When people are caught up in social customs, they are inevitably bound physically and drained mentally; therefore they cannot avoid being burdened.

Those who allow themselves to be tied down are always those whose lives are directed by externals...

Sages... use the inner to make the external enjoyable and do not use the inner to make the inner enjoyable; therefore they have spontaneous enjoyment in themselves and so have their own will, which is esteemed by the world. The reason it is so is that this is essential to the world in the world's own terms.

It is not up to another, but up to oneself; it is not up to anyone but the individual. When the individual attains it, everything is included...

Therefore sages keep nurturing their spirit, make their energy gentle; make their bodies normal, and bob with the Dao. In this way they keep company with the evolution of all things and respond to the changes in all events."

Wen Tzu - Understanding the Mysteries
translated by Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1992

• **The Way of Organic Governance**

Liu I-Ming sets out the basis of Daoist government:

"Education is endless and thought is also endless, the purpose is to improve the morals and customs of the populace. The ground of ethics gives abundant life, embracing the people without cruelty, protecting and reassuring them, minimising criminal laws, making taxes light, seeing to sufficiency of food and clothing — like taking care of an infant, nourishing and protecting without bound."

Daoist political thinking is based on the image of the family as the source of all order in the community. Mutual respect and reciprocal responsibility (and seemingly conviviality) are at the root of civilised living. People in positions of power are expected to exercise the responsibilities of an elder brother or sister, encouraging the economic and personal development of the younger or weaker members of the social family.

As ever in Daoist thinking, where the superficial eye sees only differences of interest, the intelligent observer perceives exchange and reciprocity. Liu I-Ming's succinct manifesto is both libertarian and socialist — minimising regulations and taxes while promoting full personal and social security.

Laozi said, "The more laws, the more criminals; too many regulations are subversive of good social order." One wonders how that would go down at a Tory Party conference! Political slogans are no more than quibbles on words. The Tory equivalent would be "Less regulation (of business): good; less law (protecting property): bad." In other words, "More freedom (for us) : good; more freedom (for them) : bad." All such partialities are pernicious and destructive of real commonality.

The antagonistic posturing of modern party politics is anathema to Daoism. Factionalism fosters mutual incomprehension and conflict between members of society. It freezes attitudes and thinking in erroneous opinion-mongering and precludes healthy social adaptation and flexibility of response to crisis.

The party system produces leaders who are neither fitted to rule, nor capable of producing the wonders they promise to get elected. Rather than the ideal of the caring family, the dynamic model of social relations under this kind of government is the street-gang! Where the sense of social belonging is fractured along lines of geographical and economic strata, authority degenerates into the

exercise of power. Ultimately, violence imposes its own legitimacy as the only source of authority.

The reduction of social relationship to relations of power — dominance and submission — is deeply subversive of the fabric of community, which is the only reliable source of social order. In Daoist thinking, order can never be imposed from above — it must begin at the bottom, in the peaceful organic creativity of everyday life, and extend from there naturally through the whole of society.

Laozi says, "*Ruling a country is like cooking a small fish.*" In other words, it takes a deft touch to avoid breaking the fish into pieces while ensuring it is cooked through. Ideal rulers are those whose sole concern is the integrity of the Whole. They must see both sides of any issue with which they are presented, and not be swayed by mere force of opinion.

Liu I-Ming says "The ruler who understands the principle of the mutual generation of the elements [of nature] and causes humane benevolence, justice, courtesy, knowledge and truthfulness to flow as one energy is administering the natural way of heaven and earth giving life to humans...

Administering the Way, assisting in its balance is the means whereby to accomplish the will of the world and achieve the work of the world thus helping people, causing everyone to take the way of heaven as their Dao and to take the balance of heaven and earth as their balance, preserving universal harmony intact, each realising one's true nature and purpose in life."

Mutual respect is the axis of orderly social relations. Society is seen as an intelligent organic entity and selfishness, immorality or anti-social behaviour as mere ignorance of integrity.

The moral and political dimensions of Daoism are inseparable, for they are both founded on impartiality of thought and action. Impartiality permits recognition of balance and imbalance and allows flexible adaptation to the requirements of the time.

• ***Seeking a way of life in the midst of death***

"When it comes to the matter and adjudication of criminal cases, where life is at stake, there are always obscure factors that are difficult to discern; any lack of clarity can bring disaster on the innocent. Only the wise and perspicacious can judge. Not judging presumptuously thus has the meaning of respect for life."

Liu I-Ming, Commentary on hexagram 22 ('Adornment')
'The Taoist I Ching', tr. Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1986

In judicial procedures, the Daoist approach is again very different to the Western model — where the judge has to mediate between oppositional advocates advancing mutually exclusive cases as to the guilt or not of the accused.

The Western ideal of justice is to do with establishing absolute causation (in the assumption that there is such a thing as the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth), whereas the Daoist concern is with the effect of the punishment as well as the nature of the crime.

Daoist justice does not focus on ultimate rights and wrongs but, rather, consists of seeking to heal the rift in the social order caused, or perhaps merely symptomised, by the crime.

Priority is given to reassuring and recompensing the victims or their dependants. Secondly comes finding out why the offender broke the law, then considering how to make sure the crime doesn't happen again.

The story of the wise judge who sentences a murderer to compensate for the loss of a son to the bereaved family by taking the place and family role of his victim is surely apocryphal, but dramatises the difference in attitude from modern thinking.

Above all, though it is the concern with avoiding the creation of a criminal class that distinguishes the Daoist way from modern penal policy.

The only evil is ignorance of original order, all crime is a turning away from that Reality.

When somebody robs someone else, both lose. Which is worse — to lose your goods or lose your soul (in Chinese terms, human-heartedness)? This is the greatest possession which cannot be stolen, only bartered for a mess of things or ideas. Following a crime, the victims must be reassured, their trust in natural justice healed and their loss recompensed as far as possible.

Once this hurt to the social fabric has been repaired, concern must be for the redemption of the perpetrator (in a sense, the original victim) who cannot simply be discarded or shuffled aside. Prisons are breeding grounds for future criminality, so prolonged imprisonment is to be avoided. For reasons of social hygiene, capital punishment may be preferable to extended sentences.

A society based on organic order cannot afford any permanent group of outsiders who do not subscribe to the basic moral standards of mutual respect.

"When those who execute the law do not impose unjust punishments and those subject to the law accept the consequences of their deeds" the social breach is healed.

Unless laws are seen to be reasonable and necessary for smooth social function, juridical authority loses its legitimacy. The law itself must be minimised and flexible and not be brought into disrepute through cleverness of interpretation. The meaning must be clear and acceptable to all.

Liu I-Ming says, "Adjudication of criminal cases concerns people's nature and life, and if there is any carelessness the innocent are harmed; therefore, after a conviction is established [people in a position of power] do not immediately carry out the sentence — even if the crime is unpardonable, they still postpone execution and reconsider the case, seeking a way of life in the midst of death."

The Daoist judge speaks not from the authority of the bench, but from the authority of one who has placed him or herself in the place of each protagonist, who has understood the totality of the situation that ended so unfortunately and whose major concern is to make a new beginning with the best possible outcome.

The most important principle of justice is protecting the innocent (indeed, more broadly, general innocent trust in the social fabric of mutuality) from further harm. In other words, how can normal social order be reassumed in the only way which is possible — through self-regulation?

• **Mutual Responsibility**

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peace makers." Where there is conflict of interest there cannot be good order. Coercive government cannot sustain itself, for it loses the support of the people and thus fosters disorder. Responsibility is the badge of authority; the freedom of people to pursue their own valid interests the only guarantee of legitimate rule.

Benevolence is the prime human virtue, which should mark and exemplify the wise governor. Kings were advised to study the character and customs of the people of each region of his domain and to base their social regulation on the reinforcement of productive behaviour and correction of disruptive misapprehensions and unproductive attitudes.

Mutual understanding is the foundation of good will and each individual has the right to be heard. Consensus is all-important and the individual is expected to reciprocate trust by aligning his or her will with the interest of the whole community.

The relationship between governor and governed is one of complementary responsibility. Social rights and obligations must be understood and accepted by the whole of society. The emphasis is on systems of mutual feedback and reciprocal relationship, the recognition and advancement of merit. "Those above secure their positions by benefiting those below."

To the pious Daoist, as to the traditional Confucian, every occasion of daily life is dignified by the profound realisation of spiritual modesty. *"What greater glory is there than this, when heaven does not oppose you, earth does not refuse?"* This is the integrated intelligence, when the personal mind is stilled and the mind of Dao takes its proper place. It is the heart of love and the eternal belonging of the created with uncreated creative power. The propagation of this realisation through study of principle along with observation of organic actuality is the touchstone of Dao.

Laozi said, *"The greatest rulers are hardly known at all by the people, then come those whom the people admire, then those whom they fear, then those whom they despise."* The successful ruler is the one who promotes the original natural intelligence of the people, the less fuss and propaganda the better — *"In the case of the best form of government, the people say 'We did it ourselves!'"*

Then again, rulers have to control and discipline themselves before they can hope to influence or direct the people. Laozi presents a simple recipe for effective government. *"When the storehouses are full, the people are happy. When war-horses are bred in the meadows, then people despair."*

By tradition, power is not something to be sought — indeed, it is often presented as a misfortune, since one cannot simply follow one's own interests but must put the interest of the people first above all personal concerns.

This state of disinterested flexibility of mind and soul is the aim to which the Daoist teachings tend — to learn to recognise, to interpret and to follow the Way of Nature, the Dao. All things change, but with the advent of humanity, this process of turnover takes on moral dimensions. What is moral is what is right. What is right is what is true. What is true is what endures. Life is the intersection of the timeless reality with the world of energy and inertia.

The glory of humanity is to personify the moral spirit of the universe, the compassionate unity of all organic being. The true human is indeed the Son of

Heaven, but she is also Queen of the Garden. It is not just possible but necessary that the will be done on earth as it is in heaven, for then the two domains are under a single rule.

Humanity is the apotheosis of nature, not its nemesis. Daoism is profoundly ecological in its outlook — the road to success is to emulate and cooperate with nature. Adaptability to present necessity is the prime virtue.

There is no sense of apocalyptic contingency about the world — what is, is now and will change into what will be — only our concepts of the world are contingent and fragmentary and in need of radical reformation and redemption. With due modesty as to our own human failings, there need be no drive to humanise wild nature such as drives Western 'civilisation' (as Gandhi said, if only...).

• **Sagehood and Wisdom**

When Wenzi asked him about sagehood and wisdom, Laozi said,

"To know by hearing is sagehood, to know by seeing is wisdom. Therefore sages always hear where calamity and fortune arise in order to choose their paths; the wise always see how calamity and fortune take shape in order to choose how to behave."

Sages know what is auspicious and inauspicious to the Dao of Nature, so they know the beginnings of good and bad fortune. The wise foresee how things will develop, so they know the gateways of good and bad fortune. Hearing what has not yet taken place is sagehood; seeing ahead what will take shape is wisdom. Those without hearing or seeing are ignorant and confused."

For Laozi, intelligence consists of understanding what is universal in its operation, and of perceiving what in particular is going on. The spirit is unifying and inclusive; the body is discriminatory and exclusive; the role of mind is to mediate between the ideal and the actual, to make real the spiritual aspiration for completeness and comprehension.

The brain is an organ of analysis and of synthesis, which is both its strength, when it is used properly, and its weakness when it is abused.

"After people get mixed up in temporal conditioning, the discriminatory consciousness takes charge of affairs; wine and sex distract them from reality; the lure of wealth deranges their nature, emotions and desires well forth at once, thoughts and ruminations arise in a tangle, and the mind-ruler is lost in confusion. Because habituation becomes second nature over a long period of time, it cannot be abruptly be removed. It is necessary to work on the matter in a serene and equanimous way, according to the time: eventually discrimination will cease, and the original spirit will return; the human mind will sublimate and the mind of Dao will be complete — again you will see the original self."

But this discriminatory consciousness is loved by the human mind; if you want to part from it, it is best first to clarify the mind. Once the mind is clarified, the mind of Dao appears, and the [illusory sense of separate individuality] is easily dismissed... when the mind clearly understands true and false, then the mind is not deluded by discriminatory consciousness and easily parts from it."

Liu I-Ming, Commentary on hexagram 43 ('Parting')
'The Taoist I Ching', tr. Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1986

• **Authenticity**

Daoism never was a creed of individual salvation. The individual surfs the tides of Dao. The greatest authenticity of being is when one is free from selfish considerations. The foundation of Daoist practice is not morality so much as penetrating knowledge of what eternally and transiently is. The realised sage is the True Human, a person whose behaviour and attitude reflect profound perception and digested essential knowledge of the way of life.

Daoism as a coherent body of teachings only exists as a last ditch effort to educate humans in the ecology of reality. Laozi was a legendary sage — a person of evident probity and miraculous psychological power, sought out by peasants and rulers alike for his succinct and penetrating wisdom and insight. He was a man of few words and fewer ambitions, “He who speaks does not know. He who knows does not speak.”

After a lifetime of teaching by example, ‘Old Boy Big-ears’ was heading for retirement in the mountains beyond the border of the Middle Kingdom. As Laozi, mounted on a buffalo, was passing through the final gate, the gatekeeper prevailed upon the old master to give the 81 verses making the Dao De Jing (Tao Te Ching) — which begins “*The Dao that can be defined is not the true Dao.*”

Laozi speaks for the unheard voices (as Jesus did in the Sermon on the Mount) — for the oppressed, the ecological, the feminine, the spiritual, the commonsensical — but not in the expectation of some afterlife in which justice will finally be done, rather in listening to what is really going on in the present. It is not just moral repentance, but metanoia, change of mind, that heals the broken relationship of soul. The people’s interest is always in social peace and mutual aid — it is those who want to take over and control the world who propagate war and disorder.

• **Social Ecology**

“An ecological society is more than a society that tries to check the mounting disequilibrium that exists between humanity and the natural world. Reduced to simple technical or political issues, this anaemic view of such a society’s function degrades the issues raised by an ecological critique and leads to purely technical and instrumental approaches to ecological problems. Social ecology is, first of all, a sensibility that includes not only a critique of hierarchy and domination but a reconstructive outlook that advances a participatory concept of ‘otherness’ and a new appreciation of differentiation as a social and biological desideratum.

Formalised into certain basic principles, it is also guided by an ethics that emphasises variety without structuring differences into a hierarchical order. If I were to single out the precepts for such an ethics, I would be obliged to use two words that give it meaning : participation and differentiation.

Social ecology is largely a philosophy of participation in the broadest sense of the word. In its emphasis on symbiosis as the most important factor in natural evolution, this philosophy sees ecocommunities as participatory communities.

The compensatory manner by which animals and plants foster each other’s survival, fecundity and well-being surpasses the emphasis conventional evolutionary theory places on their ‘competition’ with each other...Competition may accurately describe the workings of our capitalist market, but it does not include the more meaningful principle of complementarity...that describes the mutualistic interaction of plants and animals.

"Similarly, differentiation not only emphasises the importance of variety for ecological stability, but is also the all-important context for the eventual emergence of a nascent freedom in an ecocommunity. Complexity, a product of variety, is a crucial factor in opening alternative evolutionary pathways. The more differentiated the life-form and the environment in which it exists, the more acute is its overall sensorium, the greater its flexibility, and the more active its participation in its own evolution.

"The two concepts cannot be raised without leading to interaction with each other. The greater degree of differentiation, the wider is the degree of participation in elaborating the world of life. An ecological ethos not only affirms life, it focuses on the creativity of life."

'The Modern Crisis', Murray Bookchin,
Black Rose Books, Montréal, 1987

Bookchin's model social ecologist is no less a scientist for eschewing any pretence of a 'value-free' social ecology. The very subject matter of this integrative science is the evolution and sustainment of value in the broadest sense, the variety of which itself produces the complexity of post-modern society. The anthropological relativism of social ecology is definitive of science in the new age of global interdependency.

This humanist stance should not be confused with anthropomorphism or anthropocentrism. The social ecologist is a human being, which is to say a member of the ecocommunity which she studies, so that she is necessarily a participant in the field. Unlike the physicist, chemist or vivisectionist, she cannot alienate herself from relationship with her subject matter. The subject of 'Gaia' meaning the life of our planet as an entity, the global system or community, can be no mere intellectual hypothesis but must be acknowledged from a unitive perspective as a living Person in whom we live and move and have our being.

Religious awe is not misplaced. For who then, are we? Unless imagination drifted in along the spacelanes, everything that we are and can conceive occurs in dimensions of Her Being. It is Her love for us, Her appreciation of our manifold beauty, Her intelligence that gives and nurtures our life. Her love joins us with this world, calls us into Her knowledge. This is not a jealous God (of whom would She be jealous, than whom there is no other?). She is our Mother, who makes no demand except sincerity of mind and openness of heart (because insincerity and fear close us to full participation in Her being) and who is not forever punishing people for not doing what they said they would.

She knows there is special value in every one of Her people. Each one, it is said, contains the seed of divinity, is made in the image of God. I believe that to be true, and the converse, that there is a special unique truth in the innermost heart of every being. Something that you can only share with God, something—many things—known to you alone. This is the treasure which does not rust, that is not consumed by moths.

In more philosophical language, the moral and spiritual dimensions of life are necessary elements in any comprehensive coherent model of reality. As Bookchin points out, ecology is something in which we participate and it follows that what we discover about how ecological systems work must bear upon our understanding of our own nature. With that comprehension comes personal responsibility for the way we behave as human beings. As we develop and

mature, we lose the excuse of ignorance. From the childish fantasy of remaking the world in our own image, we grow into the adult aspiration to 'do our bit'.

Lewis Mumford's dictum "There is no wealth but life" has already sounded the death knell of the modernist dream. I shall deal later with the last fling of modernism, the quest for machine intelligence, but note here only that so-called artificial intelligence techniques already show signs of being subsumed into the post-modern project as elements in the simulation of virtual reality.

The social ecologist knows that natural systems exhibit a very high degree of intelligent organisation, and so promotes a model of ecological development as progressive diversification, overcoming local limitations of specific resources through global trade and communication, optimising what is already there and looking for sustainable maximal results from minimal apposite intervention. The modernist ideal of greenfield development, the site cleared by bulldozer, the production unit assembled from factory-made components and staffed by complaisant peasants grateful for a company baseball cap, no longer cuts the sod.

Economy of means is the hallmark of the post-modern project. Organic participative intervention in the sustainment of low-entropy high-value economic exchange is the new golden rule. This is not a regime of austerity dominated by scarcity of resources but a constant enrichment of humane ecological civilisation through convivial ways of life in mutuality with each other and the ecocommunity of which we are always a part, never apart. Such a culture requires an emphasis on the centrality of humane values and the importance of fostering the fulfilment of each individual member of the community.

Human history shows, time and time again, that a society which earns individual commitment through voluntary participation, service and idealism is likely to be both more secure and more materially prosperous than one which has to compel its subjects by force and fear. Liberty works, totalitarianism fails! Love can, will and must overcome fearfulness and institutionalised or insurgent violence.

Libertarianism should not be confused with pacifism. Pacifism is a derived value, a conscious refusal to offer or submit to violence—it is a stance or tactic. Libertarianism involves a more direct approach of or to truth—it runs deeper in the soul, encompassing a greater range of meaningful paradox. Of course, the libertarian is likely to be a pacifist, too, because he or she recognises that violence is the enemy of freedom.

The libertarian has observed how any attempt to impose order on a system, from above or without, actually degrades the pre-existent order of that system. From this perspective, order is a dynamic organic process emerging spontaneously through the mutuality of intelligent living beings, no permission or direction required. Loss of liberty is loss of intelligence.

Those who confuse liberty with licence fear the loosening of restraint, the relaxation of stricture and the abandonment of disciplined regulation; but merely betray their essential distrust of common humanity, or, perhaps more to the point, their vested interest in a system which defines order as the maximisation of their own relative advantage rather than the welfare of all.

The greatest social expression of liberty is peace—yes, indeed, and prosperity to enjoy with it.

Peace and sufficiency are the soil and fruit of liberty, for no value surpasses security in the human soul. So great is this need for security in the human

make-up, that people will accept readily anything that seems to offer a safe option. In self-protection, people will make extraordinary leaps of faith or be supernaturally resistant to any questioning of their established assumptions lest they lose the sense, or illusion, of solid ground beneath their feet. We draw boundaries out of fear, put limits on our own acceptable behaviours—and are offended when others ignore these limits.

Liberty, in the heartfelt numinous sense, does not refer to mere absence of restraint, but, wholly positively, to the realisation of unique potential. Liberty is not the freedom to remain unbound by determinacy, but, rather, the active exercise of creative choice. Mere freedom from constraint is reducible to statistical variation around a mathematical norm—in other words, pure chance.

To the libertarian conscience, immorality is acting against one's own best judgement. Having violence done to one's own nature, or doing it to oneself, is seen as the source of all violence in society. This is not just an effect of thwarted impulse, which is the heart of all learning, all socialisation. The organic limits of behaviour and community teach adaptation to and consideration of others, as we learn to modulate our self-expression to gain approval and to avoid pain and recrimination. It is when this normal process goes awry that chronic pain or acute panic festers to explode into violent behaviour. The psychopath suffers from severe dislocation of his participative self. The fearful turn ferocious. Fear feeds upon fear like a self-reinforcing chain reaction. A society where everyone has to be taught to be suspicious of strangers soon becomes a society where everyone is a stranger. Any perceived deviation from the supposed norm becomes reason to suspect inimical intent.

In this modern Babel, the most marginalised are those least likely to experience true community, to feel valued and validated in their own right. Under social stress and distress, lawlessness increases and provokes further defensiveness and communal distrust. Business caters for the flight from community by providing fortified housing, armoured motor vehicles and virtually pedestrian-free autoways—all accompanied by 24-hour in-car or home entertainment consoles. Behind the fibre-reinforced bullet and blast resistant window drapes, those who can pay subscribe to the illusion of social normality. Privatisation of middle-class life goes along with disassembly of social liberty; privatisation of government agencies with dismantling of social institutions.

Reality has become unfashionable—it was never that popular anyway!

Nevertheless, reality is what we must face, reluctantly like a petulant child, or bravely like a responsible adult. Reality, as we have seen, is first and foremost ecological and global. We have not arrived here from outer space, humanity has evolved from and in that reality—intelligent, imaginative, moral, spiritual and integrative. All of these must be articulated in the emergence of the humane future.

• **Finding the Way**

"The quality of strength in people is the innate mind that is the natural order, the celestial command. This mind is inherently complete in everyone, no more in sages and no less in ordinary people. But when it is constrained by temperament or adherence to artificial standards of behaviour and covered by human desires, one takes pain for pleasure and will not turn back.

If people will turn back, natural goodness will appear; one good can dissolve a hundred evils, and one can immediately climb up on the shore of Dao. Then those with fault can arrive at impeccability. Even if people are ordinary and mundane, if they know and practise this path, calamity turns into fortune, and companions attain felicity. The original order of living potential is again released, and stagnation turns into tranquillity."

Liu I-Ming, Commentary on line 4 of hexagram 12 ('Obstruction')

'The Taoist I Ching ', tr. Thomas Cleary, Shambhala Books, 1986

Daoism is based on deep contemplative understanding and direct observation of 'the way the world works'. It is a discipline of thought and being aimed at the realisation of the identity of the Way of humanity with the Dao of eternal and essential Truth.

In both personal and social terms, humanity is understood as an evolution from separation towards community, from exclusivisms of all sorts to inclusivism, from lower to higher concerns. To the individual, the moral imperative of development is finding one's way, which means both recognising one's own innate nature and one's involvement in the evolution of the world. In this sense, Dao implies the way of individual realisation and its alignment with the design of universal nature.

This is the Dao as the Dharma of the Buddhists, the Yoga of the Hindus, the Covenant of the Jews, the Salvation of the Christians, and the Hajj ul Haqq of the Muslims. It is life as a Journey, a search for the true meaning of existence, a pilgrimage involving the discovery and dedication of one's being to the Real.

Ultimately, as Karl Marx pointed out, it is love which leads us to treat the objects of our perceptions as being real. Unlike the religions, or, indeed, millenarian social movements, Daoism is not predicated on a supernatural infrastructure of belief by which alone one can be saved. Daoism perceives spirit not as the operation of divine sanction but as the necessary transcendent essence of material evolution.

The terms 'heaven and earth' have spiritual significance without supernatural implication. Heaven refers to the original nature of all events and inclinations; earth refers to the derived nature of contingent outcome. Heaven means impulse; earth means resistance. Heaven is the source of all value, pure and uncompromised; earth is the working out of these values in the manifold interaction of phenomena.

In no sense does the polarisation of heaven and earth imply a division between good and evil which it does in lapsarian faiths. If this world is the world that sin begot, it is also the starting point of the Way of return to integrity. It is said, *"Though you have strayed far from the path for many years, it only takes an instant to return back to the Way."*

Laozi talks of something existing before heaven and earth that is the unknown mysterious source of all being which, since he does not know any better, he calls Dao — the Way :

"Man follows the way of earth, Earth follows the way of heaven, Heaven follows the way of Dao, Dao follows the way of nature."

Because of this insistence upon the simultaneous omnipresence of the creative process in both its immanent and transcendent aspects, Daoism requires no theology. It rests neither on faith nor belief, but exclusively on non-dualistic observation of what really goes on. It is mere ignorance to seek supernatural explanations and meanings when the truth of life itself before your eyes is always so subtle and surprising.

The term, heaven, is easily misunderstood in a literalist interpretation. In the Christian tradition, heaven is a spiritual realm or place, the abode of gods and angelic spirits, and the location of the afterlife.

In the teachings of Jesus himself, heaven represents a state of union with higher reality (which he calls *'My Father's Kingdom'*), a state which you need to seek first, which is within you and into which you must enter, *"as a little child."* This is closer to the Daoist meaning of heaven as a metaphor for the unconditioned Supreme Ultimate than it is to any literal interpretation of heaven as a region in outer space or as some sort of other world or afterlife.

For the Supreme Ultimate (Taiji, represented in the famous symbol ☯) to manifest, it requires extension: the dimension of breadth as well as spiritual height. Thus does the Taiji give birth to heaven and earth as complementary principles of existence. These poles delineate the field of human moral development, as indeed they do in Jesus' delineation in the Lord's Prayer.

The intent is identical to the Daoist Way of returning to and remaining in close intimate contact with the ever-present principle of all things.

"Out of the One arises the Two; out of the Two, the Three are born; out of the Three emerge the ten thousand things."

When the one is concealed in itself, the parts thus seemingly separated yearn for the dissolution of difference in mutual union. The bliss of this intercourse causes the desire for its prolongation which brings about the reproduction of the beloved, the source of all spiritual and material existence.

Worship is like sex — devotion to opposite complementarity, the source of our daily bread, the educative tempter and the protector of our innocence. That which is of earth — the conditioned, delineated and limited — is brought into harmonic resonance with that which is of heaven — the original, the infinite and omnipresent.

The universal is instantiated in the particular without exclusion. The moral soul is developed by taking on the incommensurate and rendering it humane. The divine is brought down to human level, only insofar as the human is raised into divinity. It is integral to the teachings of both Jesus and Laozi that the human being should not merely withdraw from mundanity into cosmic spirituality, but must seek to elevate everyday business into the realm of the divine imperatives of faithfulness to the unvarnished truth and compassionate empathy with all beings.

• **Religion and Morality**

The conception of freely-accepted responsibility for one's nature is at the root of Chinese moral philosophy. The influence of Chinese thought, especially Daoism, on Buddhism produced the Mahayana branch with its emphasis on the collective dimension of salvation in which the Bodhisattva freely undertakes to postpone individual liberation until all beings are equally free.

Daoism posits no supernaturalism or salvationism — the world is seen as its own veil, not as a fallen dimension of existence contingent upon another reality. It is not reality which is at fault, but false understanding of that reality.

Daoism is not opposed to religion as such, since clearly the Dao is the living source of all truths, revealed or discovered. The Christian Gospels, for example, can be profitably read by the Daoist as the story of a master of Dao — a True Human — in conflict with an apocalyptic culture intent upon electing and crucifying Messiahs.

The Gospels are full of limpid passages expounding the Daoist themes of simplicity of soul, reciprocity of action and taking spiritual responsibility for one's awakening to life, but the times of Jesus demanded dramatic dialogues between rival gods and the Gospels show the tragic unfoldment of the culminating history.

The Daoist interpretation of the symbol of the crucifixion is precisely that the truth cannot be suppressed by breaking the vessel through which it flows. Life and death merely recycle the unboundedness of being. For the Daoist, immortality means identification with the undying ever-borning, freedom from material concern, and absolute dedication of one's selfhood to the Way of the Spirit.

Jesus says, *"Is there one of you who can extend your life one second by worry and circumspection? Take no thought for the morrow... Consider the lilies of the field, they spin not neither do they sew, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed so finely as one of these."* These are hardly the words of a dyed-in-the-wool revolutionary intent upon overthrowing established authority and founding a new world order.

And yet, these pacifying gentle sentiments are profoundly subversive of normal social order. It is like the modern Green movement — by questioning the most basic grounds of economic organisation, they throw into sharp relief the disnaturalism of our current lifestyle. This moral challenge can hardly fail to arouse the uncontrolled power of the established interests to resist disruption of their operational machinery.

Laozi asked, *"Why does everybody like the Dao so much at first? Isn't it because you find what you seek and are forgiven your sins?"*

In the Messianic hysteria of 1st Century Palestine, similar sentiments aroused the righteous establishment to a frenzy, as recounted in the Jesus story. The sage calls people from their bourgeois concerns with familial duties and the accumulation of wealth to return to follow the Way of eternal values.

Both Laozi and Jesus make it clear that mundane security is illusory, the cult of self a morbid fantasy of power, and that those who seek true immortality must identify with the greater Whole. Jesus calls this entering the kingdom of heaven, Laozi talks about returning to original mind (metanoia), but he too uses the

image of heaven in a very Christian-sounding context, *"Heaven's net casts wide. Though its meshes are coarse, nothing slips through."*

• ***Redemption in the Spirit***

"The highest good is like water, it seeks out the lowest places. Though its substance appears to be soft, yet it will wear down any obstruction — by persistence in its own nature."

Laozi

Laozi is in many ways an archetype rather than a historical personage — we might say, the voice of higher intelligence, or the source of the teachings. In this sense, all the avatars, Buddhas, enlightened and anointed beings are archetypes of the same Personage — which is to say, a living presence or level of being and self-realisation.

It is no coincidence that the life and teachings of Jesus evoke similar metaphors or parables, exemplifying one fully awakened to the highest good who does not turn away from those who are degraded and suffering.

The teachings of Jesus recorded in the Gospels show a remarkable lack of concern, even evasiveness, with respect to metaphysical issues. He speaks of 'the Kingdom of God' in parables rather than in schemas of the structure of Creation. There are two important exceptions, at first sight seemingly contradictory : *"The kingdom of God is within you."* (Luke 17:21) and *"No man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6).

The first statement also expresses the essence of Daoist thinking (as indeed of all religious teaching). By contrast, the second statement has been interpreted that Christianity alone is the way of truth. The Christian way of life is based on fostering the Reality of this Presence.

The question then is, does the Daoist sage experience a different Presence? Is the Dao a separate reality from the Christ? I cannot accept that someone who has had a taste of the sincere practice and spiritual realisation of these different religions could doubt the real unity of the destination of these paths to the Truth.

As Christian theologians have been brought into greater contact with spiritually advanced beings from other traditions, these issues have become a pressing concern. In Protestant theology, this has led to the development of different schools of scriptural interpretation — the so-called 'realist' and 'non-realist' schools.

Clearly, the question "Does God really exist?" depends upon what is meant by the symbol, God, upon what is meant by 'really' and upon what is meant by 'exist.' There can be no metaphysical discussion until we agree upon the use of these terms. The issue is in the first place one of linguistics, and so a matter of the language current in a given culture. What the teachings of Jesus have in common with those of Laozi and of Buddha is an emphasis on spiritual development rather than theological metaphysics. The issue is not so much what is good for God, but what is good for the aspirant human being.

I would advance a realist but non-literalist view of religious teachings. God is a Being, not an Idea — the creator, not the creation of human thought. Being is like an ever-flowing stream; an idea or concept is like a water container. Is

Jesus talking of the water or the vessel when he says, "*he that hath seen me, hath seen the Father*" ? (John 14:6)

As a perfect sage — in Daoist terms, a True Human — Jesus is wholly identified with the Divine Spirit.

There is no part of his self-concept that is not suffused with Unity with the divine. "*Inside and outside merge with the Dao, in perfect goodness without evil, wholly integrated with the design of nature.*" (Liu I-Ming)

From this perspective, "*No man cometh unto the Father, but by me*" points to the integrity of the redemptive power of the spirit. The life of Jesus is a pouring of the waters of eternity through the experience of humanity. Jesus literally shows us the Way to identification with our higher inclusive nature and shows us how to free ourselves from the very real danger of losing our soul to trivial or mundane concerns.

"*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness*" (Matthew 6:33) means opening our false idea of ourselves to refreshment from the original authentic spring. It means getting in touch with the real, if not necessarily the literal, presence of the Living Christ.

In Christian theology, the advent or recognition of the holy spirit is represented as bestowing 7 gifts — wisdom, understanding, right judgement, courage, reverence, wonder and awe. The cultivation of these transcendent qualities fosters the development of the humane qualities — the 12 fruits of the Pentecostal blessing. These are charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control and chastity.

Authority — the correct exercise of the power implicit in the culturally loaded and hence confusing use of the term kingdom — depends upon authenticity, not vice versa. The rulership of the holy is inherent intelligence which must not be pre-empted or diverted by considerations of hierarchical status.

There is a Zen Buddhist teaching, "*If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him.*" Real knowledge of what we are precludes limitation by external appearance. Breaking the vessel spills, but does not hurt, the water.

The same essential intelligence is expressed in the often-misunderstood Daoist teaching, "*the sage regards ordinary people as straw dogs.*" Straw dogs are ritual sacrifice objects, to be destroyed or discarded once their ceremonial role has been fulfilled. We must be redeemed from our imprisonment in false ideas of self, to be liberated to experience the true Person of humanity.

Laozi says "*Have done with theory!*" The way to truth is through the reality of being, not through the virtuality of ideation. Bright ideas cloud the eye, dazzle the heart with confusion and fever the brain. "*Others are busy being productive, I alone am dull,*" says Laozi, "*I seek my nourishment from the Mother.*"

Which is not to trigger another unproductive theological debate, except to note that denial of the Motherhood of God results from preferring language over spirit and is a product of the impoverishment by intellectual ideas against which Laozi warns.

• **Unanimity**

Daoism is in no meaningful sense a Chinese movement, anymore than its original contemporary, Platonism, has been confined to Greece, Buddhism to India, or Islam to Arabia. Indeed, to a Daoist, there is little doubt of the authenticity of the great teachers of all religions and paths of spiritual development.

Perhaps the closest parallel is with the attitude of the great psychologist of the soul, C. G. Jung, who saw mythologies and scriptures as explorations of the great themes of the human imagination — indeed as the deepest revelations of the continuity of human nature. The archetypes recur because they represent the drives of our own inner constitution.

The greatest and yet infinitely elusive archetype is that which Jung calls the Self — the subject of all myths, faiths and beliefs, dreams and visions.

In this perspective, spiritual growth is the expression of a dialectic between the conditioned localised self and the indeterminate plenum of the true Self of all existence.

"When the human mind departs, what remains is the mind of Dao." (Liu I-Ming)

The relationship of all entities with this plenum is identity; the mark of recognition of this reality is unanimity. This is the esoteric meaning of the formula, *"In His own image, man and woman, He created them."* In pagan terms, it is *"As above, so below."*

The 13th Century theologian philosopher, John of Duns called Scotus, taught that each individual has a unique relationship with the Creator, the connection of ipseity (selfness). Each soul is, as it were, a fragment or emanation of the substance of the Creator — which is love. The proper return of this gift is for the individual to accept responsibility for the administration of the divine function.

Scotus preached that the supreme human dignity was not so much love of God as love with God. In other words, we approach divinity from within — from our identity with the supreme being, rather than from our manifest ontological difference. So abstruse — or perhaps, subversive — was this doctrine thought to be, that Duns Scotus entered the English language as the origin of the term dunce. To the ignorant, intelligence is just another form of stupidity.

20th Century science has given us a telling metaphor, or paradigm, for the fundamental truth of plenary identity in the discovery of the hologram. Unlike a conventional photo, if a holo is cut up or broken into pieces, each piece contains a complete representation of the whole image, only proportionately indistinct. This itself is a reflection of the wave mechanics of light, whereby what we see is the resultant of a range of wave fronts interfering by phase reinforcement or cancellation to produce a composite image.

We are now discovering that the way we perceive this complex wave front as a coherent gestalt arises from a probabilistic integration of the neural network, as impressions and reactions are similarly reinforced and cancelled in the firing of sets of neurons. With modern scanning technology it is actually possible to see 'notion waves' as they sweep through the brain in response to some ideational stimulus.

Just as we distinguish light from heat by the way it bears information rather than mere energy, so we are coming to realise that our perception and

behaviour is modulated through processional chemical waves of neural transmitters and hormones.

• ***Ecological Succession***

The tree belongs to the forest. Trees are essential, but not the only component of a forest — when the forest disappears, only urban amenity planting remains! A forest is much more than an idea, a line on a map, or a scientific catalogue of a species. It is the rich integration and diversification of niche that makes a forest what ecologists call a climax ecosystem. It is the sustainable product of a process of succession or colonisation by a growing variety of species.

In the early stages of ecological succession, there is an annual surplus of organic production over consumption (photosynthesis exceeds respiration). Every year, more grows than the previous year and more microbes and animals arrive to feast on plants and each other. Gradually, large slow-growing plants come to dominate the physical structure of the developing forest. When the oldest of these long-lived organisms start to die and collapse, the healthy forest approaches a steady state in which trees of all ages are present, so that the climax is self-renewing and consumption exactly equals production.

Under different conditions, a climax ecosystem may come to be dominated by large animals. Such is the savannah, prairie or steppe grassland, where grazing pressure is sufficient to prevent the maturation of a treed landscape. Perhaps the crucial factor distinguishing the grassy from the forested climax is relative aridity, although to some extent this is an effect of the divergent tracks of succession rather than to one simple cause.

Whatever, there is both physiological and palaeological evidence that human beings evolved from tree dwelling primates in a savannah environment. The upright stance and forward facing eyes make more ecological sense in an animal making its living amongst long grasses rather than in the midst of dense woodland.

The large brain is a sign of strong need for sophisticated communication between members of this species. It is like a personal computer on a network — local processing of shared information leverages the power of each node and the overall power of the community on the net. Just as neural organisation facilitates the integration of the experience of the individual organism, so the networking of brains in cultural organisation integrates the experience of the community.

The operational human organism constitutes any number of individuals bound in mutual cultural interdependence. This organism is now global in scope and evolving rapidly beyond tribalism and antithetical modernism. Although many seek secure continuity in atavistic pseudo-tribalism or religious traditionalism, this partialism is no longer adequate or adaptive. A new, truly intelligent, human species is in the process of evolution. Nothing will be left untouched by this metamorphosis. Comprehension compels compassion.

The process of civilisation, identified by many as the progress of history, is equivalent to ecological intensification of human settlement of Planet Earth. Successional progress may be measured by the percentage of biological production harvested for human purposes or otherwise mediated by human intervention. The sheer scale and power of this ecological transformation suggests to some that the logical outcome will be the colonisation of near and, eventually, outer space. This has been likened to the growth and budding of the

slime mould organism, bursting and releasing spores to drift through the universe. Of course, the analogy is totally inadequate to the unprecedentedness of the human phenomenon, save to emphasis the ecological nature of the process.

Humans are unique, not because they transgress ecology, but because they represent the apotheosis of the ecological imperative. The irony is that our very ecological success compels our self-transformation.

Large-brained species have the power to modify their own self-programming. Rather, we might say that neural sophistication permits the generation of a wider variability of behavioural response — as a result of a change of mind rather than genetic mutation or recombination. We have the power to reinvent ourselves by selecting different responses from our repertoire.

Culture evolves very quickly in response to environmental variability. Increasingly, the necessity for change arises due to human action and ecological reaction. The last half century has taken us from the first public application of effective antibiotics to the beginning of the biochemical revolution. We have yet to taste the full fruits of the extraordinary advances in our understanding of our own biochemistry.

With genetic engineering, anything is possible — we could turn ourselves literally into little green men! The photosynthetic human might seem to be the ultimate vegetarian fantasy — you wouldn't even need to be cruel to plants — but actually the likely energy efficiency of human chloroplast would argue for very big, relatively immobile, viridian persons of both sexes. So you want to be a tree? OK, *homo arborescens* is a real option, DNA-wise. How about *homo aquaticus*, *homo minimus*, *homo cyberesecens*? In the title of a Philip K Dick book, 'We can build you, wholesale.'

Unless you're thinking science fiction, you're dwelling in the past. Failing SF, religious mediaevalism — abominations, mental and physical plagues and witch hunts and apocalypticism find fertile ground in the boggled imagination.

Instrumental cleverness itself, in the extreme, produces the most far-reaching challenges to our survival. The classic modern example is the salutary history of the chlorofluorocarbons.

CFCs were explicitly developed to be the safest possible compounds for propellant and refrigerant applications. Safety in this context was equated to non-reactivity in the widest range of environmental conditions. In practice, the very stability of CFC compounds guarantees that they will eventually come into contact with any hyper-reactive chemicals if they exist anywhere in the natural environment. Ozone is produced in a continual process by the absorption of ultraviolet energy in the upper stratosphere. Because ozone is so reactive, under normal conditions it never poses any threat to life on the surface. In effect, ozone plays a vital part in the 'softening' of incident hard radiation as its energy is gradually rather than catastrophically absorbed — like the flexing of a safety net under a falling impact. Mathematically, this is represented as a non-linear curve. So many factors are interrelated that it is impossible to predict the effect of a linear displacement of one of the factors involved. No simple relation between input and output can be relied upon.

The chemical engineers who pushed the slider marked 'Safety' up as far as they could make it go when designing or selecting CFCs had no means of knowing in

advance what this local maximisation might imply for global safety as a whole. Indeed, their logic was impeccable (but fatally flawed):

1. CFCs are effectively inert
2. Inertness implies long-lasting persistence in the environment.
3. But persistence of CFCs isn't a problem, because they are inert.

The logical flaw here is that identified by Murphy:

1. CFCs are extremely inert
2. Inertness implies long-lasting persistence in the environment.
3. If there is any possibility at all that CFCs will react, reaction must happen if they persist long enough.

The issue then, is what is the capacity of the global system to absorb the impact of the unpredictable worst-case scenario?

No doubt, further cleverness is our best chance of rescuing us from the consequences of our own ignorant instrumentalism — our inveterate fantasy of twiddling with the knobs to see what will happen. But it needs cleverness or, rather, intelligence of a higher order than the technophilia that has got us into this bother in the first place, time after time.

Monoculturalism, indeed, is the greatest threat to global stability, for it depletes the range of available response to unforeseen impact while extending this impact as thoroughly and pervasively as possible.

Darwin and Murphy will sort us out. We must honour our diversity in full respect for our integrity with all life. We must remake ourselves in the image of that Compassionate Unanimity which it is our mission to evolve into the world.

Laozi observes, *"As for those who try to take the world and improve it, I notice that they are only too likely to make things worse."* He describes the ideal land as being small, with technology minimised *"a hundredfold beyond its use."* Human scale is what matters, cleverness only creates trouble.

Organic morality, though it may seem the softest thing in the universe, is the only reliable guide to living in harmony with one's own nature.

Wishing things to be other than what they are is the greatest curse because it distracts from what they really are.

It is precisely this realism and distrust of human emotional fantasy that is the message of Daoism. Wanting things for oneself is a sign of the sickness of ignorance of the true nature of belonging and possession. Crude materialism is as great a danger as unfettered fantasy or metaphysics.

Liberation from circumscriptive belief, attitude or opinion is the Way of which the Daoist sages speak. In the West, this method of self-development is best known through its assimilation to Mahayana Buddhism in the Dhyana, Qan or Zen school of meditation. It is known as the way of all-at-once enlightenment, or return from a very small distance. The point is not to reject or abandon the world, but by taking it into oneself, to realise one's identity with all being.

The hidden factor in the human affairs is the operation of superhuman intelligence. Mahayana means Great Vehicle, and it is Buddha who traverses the broad way of Dao.

This is the ultimate product of neural sophistication and holonic integration. The world is ruled, not by the selfish gene, but by boundless compassion. This is the same power by which the earth flowers every spring. Some call it Dao, I do not know what it means.