

TAOISM AND DEEP (ECOLOGICAL) THEORY:

a preliminary object-theoretic investigation.

There is a remarkable, and remarked, convergence of themes of deeper ecological positions, such as Deep Ecology, with those of Taoism.¹ Given that Deep Theory has not received adequate elaboration in important directions, particularly metaphysical and political directions, the older wisdom of Tao can be profitably drawn upon to elaborate and enrich deeper positions. Where Taoism does diverge from Deep Ecology (our working example since it is presently the best known deep environmental theory) concerns some of the weakest and most controversial parts of the Deep Ecology platform, such as the theme of Biospheric Egalitarianism, the equality of all (living) beings.² Thus Taoism can also provide a base for

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- 1 The connections are remarked in some of the prime texts for Deep Ecology, for which see Devall and Sessions (and therein p.100), and also CD. Not all the connections assumed in Deep Ecology sources are correct however; in particular Taoism does not deductively deliver the platform of Deep Ecology. At most it informs the platform, which it would, if taken seriously, *alter*.
 - 2 A critical exposition of Deep Ecology, which surveys the main themes, is ventured in Sylvan CD. In several significant respects, Taoism offers a (retrospective) improvement on Deep Ecology, being free of the excessive junk Deep Ecology has quickly accumulated. Fortunately for those averse to intellectual junk such as environmental thought tends to collect (though no doubt for later building or recycling), Deep Ecology is but one deep ecological position. Another, presently being worked out in some detail, is Deep Green Theory, the ecological part of a more comprehensive Deep Theory, which is intended to cover a much broader region of philosophical ideas. Deep Theory includes, for instance, what adds to the depth, depth relevant logic, intenzional object theory, and deep pluralism. As will begin to become evident, Taoism proves to be a very congenial position for Deep Theory, and for Deep Green Theory in particular. Thus it can most usefully be applied to illuminate Deep Theory, as well as adding to its historical depth. But in this preliminary investigation, we become so caught up in interpreting and explaining authentic Taoism, that we do not get to much explicit elaboration of Deep Green Theory.

A corollary we want to draw from our investigations (preliminary though they are) bears upon, and when developed may help to eradicate, a commonplace Western complacency and smug superiority. A widespread, though usually subterranean, view in philosophy is that the East really has little or nothing to offer. This view even extends far into environmental philosophy (cf. Rolston's put-down). It is often part of cultural chauvinism; Western scientific industrial culture doesn't have much to learn from other, generally more backward or primitive or scientifically crude, cultures. The West is the cultural pace-setter, with the information, resources, etc. Observe however that a nothing-new-to-offer position need not reject old theories as worthless and not worth bothering with; in less brash form it can allow

correction and adjustment of Deep Ecology, and an impressionistic guide to a more satisfactory and richer deep theory. Taoism is throughout decidedly ecologically oriented; a high level of ecological consciousness is built into it, a main recipe amounting to *Follow Nature* as the basis of practice. It is also, so it transpires, a very congenial philosophic way-station for ecologically-concerned intellectual travellers weary of mainstream Anglo-American and Continental philosophies which inform and reinforce the dominant Western social paradigm.

Both for background, and in order to arrive immediately in the thick of the comparison, we outline a main part of the Deep Ecology platform in (typical) slogan form and contrast it on the one side with predominant Western attitudes and platitudes and on the other side with Taoism.

TABLE 1. DEEP ECOLOGY CONTRASTED WITH THE DOMINANT PARADIGM AND WITH TAOISM

DOMINANT (WESTERN) PARADIGM	DEEP ECOLOGY (DE)	TAOISM
Domination over nature	Harmony with nature	Elaboration of DE
Nature a resource; intrinsic value confined to humans	Natural environment valued for itself	Much for DE; "humanism" rejected
Humane supremacy	Biocentric egalitarianism	Differs from DE; wide impartiality
Ample resources/substitutes	Earth supplies limited	Supplies ample
Material economic growth a predominant goal	Non-material goals, especially self-realization	Following Tao-te

that there is interest and merit in historical and reconstruction exercises. What it cannot allow is news, such as News from Tao. Thus it does clash with what we argue, that such deep theories as Deep Ecology can benefit and learn from Taoism. Taoism offers a striking time-tested theory upon which Deep Theory can draw, an ongoing source of inspiration and wisdom. Taoism texts may lack the detail of prime Western (non-industrial) sources such as the texts of Aristotle or Plato; but they offer a much more congenial source for Deep Theory.

Consumerism	Doing with enough/ recycling	Doing with enough (recycling inappropriate)
Competitive lifestyle	Cooperative lifeway	Much as for DE: voluntary simplicity
Centralized/urban centred/ national focus	Decentralized/bioregional /neighbourhood focus	As for DE
Power structure hierarchical	Non-hierarchical/ grassroots democracy	Hierarchy without power structure
High technology	Appropriate technology	Limited technology

The contrasts tabulated are of limited accuracy, because condensed to slogans, and also limited because much of importance is omitted, especially from Taoism (which as so far portrayed only reflects themes of Deep Ecology). In what follows several of the contrasts will be expanded, and main omissions rectified. The richness of Taoism, the philosophical topics traversed to which nothing corresponds in Deep Ecology, will mean that Deep Ecology is often left far behind.³

Deep Ecology offers however a different perspective on Taoism than has been arrived at before. Not only can Taoism further Deep Ecology, then, but the compliment can be returned. A comparison of Taoism with deep ecological theory can hardly be our only objective; as an essential preliminary, much effort is directed at systematising Taoism. In the course of this outside endeavour, we succumbed to a rather too familiar taunting challenge: to draw something philosophically solid, of contemporary relevance, from the ancient Taoist texts. A key element in our attempt to pull off something mind-expanding has been an object-theoretic interpretation of perhaps the most vexing part of elusive Taoist theory, the "metaphysics". Taoism lends itself to natural systematisation in terms of noneism (the brand

3 We have not attempted anything approaching a full coverage of features of Taoism of contemporary philosophical interest; but a *fuller* coverage is an eventual eco-theoretic objective. The main works repay repeated fossicking.

There is, for instance, a significant doctrine of opposites in Taoism, likely *not* the same as that in the main Chinese tradition, which needs fathoming, and linking with common ancient themes of balance and dynamic equilibrium of healthy systems. Every sort of thing, every category has an opposite, which furthermore interacts with its dual. In theory, the opposition appears to be tied to a (questionable) contrast theory of meaning. In practice, the opposites tend to be reconciled or harmonized, but *not* in a Hegelian fashion by ascent, but through taking a middle way (natural compromise rather than dialectic confrontation).

of object-theory developed in JB). For not only is the theory woven around certain striking objects – Tao, Te, Tzu-jan, and others – not only does the theory cleverly exploit an object-theoretic cosmology; but also important, the theory, though remarkably free of the type of religious trappings and claptrap that ontologically weigh down most older or traditional ideologies, is opposed to and is highly resistant to reductionistic practices. That is, like noneism, Taoism takes a no-rubbish non-reductionist stance. It is in part for such reasons – especially that most everything in what it is and neither some other (approved) item nor reducible to such other item – that Taoism avoids the common-sense implausibility and scientific naivety of many a position, old and new: that for instance everything reduces to water or air or fire or matter or energy or superstrings

Evidently, in advancing such noneist claims and other claims about what Taoists say or imply, an interpretation is adopted, when often enough other rival interpretations of the central texts are supportable. Indeed such a small body of theoretical work as the basic Taoist texts comprise is far from categorical and is bound to admit of a plurality of non-isomorphic interpretations.⁴ The main arguments we should offer for the selection we make from the basket of admissible interpretations are these: the interpretation we offer is very straightforward and is mostly an “obvious reading”; for the most part such an interpretation has already been offered, in other connections, by others much better informed than we are about the Chinese texts; and that it is a relevant and important one for deep ecological purposes. Finally we should remark that we are essentially concerned with the systematisation of only the first two Taoist texts (LT and CT) and focus upon LT. In brasher moments we are inclined to think that the framework supplied (brushstrokes behind the old master's impressionistic brushstrokes) will enable us to take philosophical account of almost everything in the compact LT; we are not nearly so confident as regards CT.

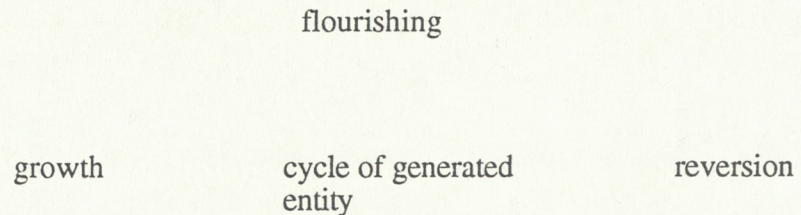
1. **Nature, cosmology, and the character of Tao.** Taoism sketches a cosmology while Deep Ecology does not. The cosmology is interestingly at variance with dominant Western cosmologies. For the universe arises out of nothing. Being arises in accordance with Tao, which precedes existence. Nonbeing precedes Being. Nonbeing is ultimate (according to Chang Tzu) and comes first.

4 There are significant pluralistic lessons for hermeneutics to be drawn from the logical investigations of categoricity of postulate systems and the typical *failure* of categoricity.

All things in the world come from being
And being comes from nonbeing (LT 40).

The universe had a primeval beginning, coming into existence from nothing (SB p.202).

DIAGRAM 1. TAOIST CYCLE OF RETURN (cf. Chan p.173 fn 2).



NATURE (HEAVEN AND EARTH, or
ACTUAL UNIVERSE): Existent, Named, Temporal

(FORMING) SOURCE: Nonexistent, Nameless, Eternal

Every entity arises out of (material) nothingness and eventually falls back into nothingness;⁵ all that comes to pass, that is. 'All things flourish, but each one returns to its root' (LT 16). The whole, the integrated natural system, is a process of becoming and decay. But the emphasis upon process, evolution and change, upon Nature as flux and transformation, is

5 For a detailed contemporary presentation of such a cosmological cycle, see Sylvan CS. In Neo-Taoism, e.g. Kao Hsiang, such a cycle is disputed, on standard ontological grounds (see e.g. Chan SB, p.335)

A serious complication is induced in the Taoist cosmological story by variations on the traditional interpretation of the later verses of LT 1. (On the variations, see Chan p.99 note 5; the linkage of Nonbeing with "no desires" is not however so remote as Chan tries to make out; see LT 37.) The variations (which replace having desires and having no desires by Being and Nonbeing) lead to dialectic complications of a Hegelian cast. For they make Being and Nonbeing ultimately the *same*, no doubt because of the becoming and reversion of each generated being to nonbeing. (Becoming is seen by the modern translators Hegelian-style, as the product of Being and Nonbeing.) Of course there is bound to be some dialectic elaboration of Taoism in any case; e.g. Tao itself is both nameless (LT 1) and named (LT 14), though in a slack sense. Thus Tao is both nameless because nonexistent and not fully conceptualisable or describable; and also named, because called 'Tao', 'the Subtle', etc., and theorisable about.

much enhanced in Chang Tzu, over the work of Lao Tzu, where more stress is put upon stability, constancy and equilibrium (cf. Chan p.20, also SB p.177). Overall, it is correct to say, if not highly informative, that Tao is a natural process philosophy, with a keen sense both of *change* and of *limits*.

The novel cosmology – the emergence of what exists from nothing – is made feasible through adoption of rudiments of a theory of objects (in the style much later elaborated by Reid, Meinong and others). Nonbeing, what does not exist, is not formless or empty, an indescribable nullity, as previous Chinese schools had apparently invariably thought (Chan, p.8). On the contrary, it is not devoid of characteristics, but has definite features. Perhaps wisely (if unfortunately from an analytic angle) authentic Taoism is largely silent on such questions as to exactly which features nonexistent items have. But enough is said to reveal how what does not exist – above all Tao – may yet have very distinctive features, while yet lacking other properties (such as existence). Main examples, some repeatedly alluded to, are those of gaps, lacunae, vacant spaces, as with a hollow bowl (LT 4), or empty utensil or window space or lightweight wheel (LT 11), or valley. The unoccupied space of a room for example has definite dimensions, location, and so forth; and its function and utility depends upon its not being occupied (LT 11).

Rudiments of object-theory are however coupled with a curiously narrow doctrine of names, perhaps as a concession to rival Chinese schools and with a view to making its nonstandard position devastatingly clear. (This would parallel then the contemporary concession of *reference* to mainstream schools, in virtue of which nonexistent objects are not referents; there are no referring terms, “referential names”, which signify them.) According to this doctrine of names, only what is a concrete individual and partly at least describable in quite particular ostensive terms is nameable (nor at least *primarily* nameable). As Wang Pi, an early commentator, indicated, names have a restricted role, naming requiring circumscription, ‘the name that can be named point[s] to a particular affair’ (p.1). Thus, for example, the main transcendental notions are not nameable, Tao in particular. Tao, though a “great form”, though at least apparently “named” honorifically in several ways, is not named thereby, but is nameless, because not suitably circumscribed, because not a particular (affair). Similarly for the other central notions of Taoism, such as Te; though they can be described, in approximate fashion, they cannot be named. ‘Tao’, ‘Te’ and the like are not (primary) *names*, but rather (like ‘God’ and ‘Vulcan’ on contemporary theories) condensed descriptions. They could be said to be *titles*. ‘Name’ has been contracted, perhaps unduly, to ‘primary name’.

There is another very important reason for eschewing names, or at least treating them –

and descriptions – with due caution. Names come with classification, with conceptualisation, with carving the whole block, with imposition of a theoretical grid on the seamless Whole.⁶ Usual metaphysical theories presuppose one or another of standard, narrow and limiting, conceptualisations and classifications, some perspective already carving up the Whole. Names, basic to the linguistics of such carving operations, have a major role in the worldification, in breaking up the One, which is simple and undifferentated, and typically a major role in imposing a single impoverishing theoretical grid (e.g. recent empiricist perspectives eliminate intensional and evaluative richness from the presented stuff). Part of the point of the “uncarved block” image – which symbolises the One (among other things, it is also a symbol for simplicity, and naturalness, for things not spoiled by artifice), the One simple and undifferentiated, the unity behind all multiplicity – is to get at the purity and unity of Tao before conceptualisation, before naming, before the differentiating and perhaps distorting conferring of names.

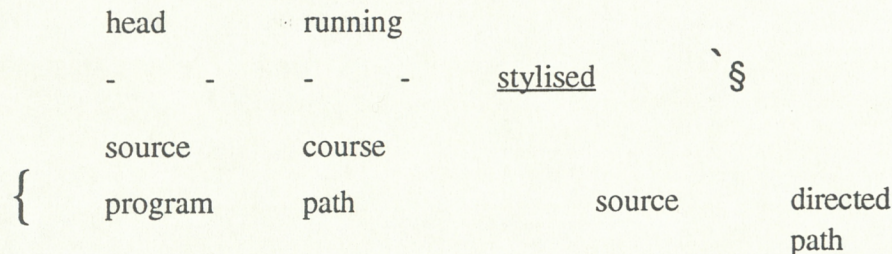
Though Tao is so nameless, that is, it is not an existent concrete thing (e.g. a particular), nonetheless a lot can be said *about* the Tao, by way of description (see the excellent summary of Taoist descriptions in Chan pp.6-7). Though Tao is a single item, One, unity behind multiplicity, under conceptualisations it is ‘complex’, many things: source of everything, great form regulating both nature and conduct, Way of satisfactory conduct and proper lives, and derivatively it is ‘invisible’, ‘inaudible’, ‘vague and elusive’. Nothing important conceptualised in Taoism comes in neat single form. All the main features and notions of Taoism – principles, models, examples, etc. – appear in such multiple form: metaphysical, ethical, etc. The artificial boundaries between these areas are broken down. Tao itself exhibits this plural conceptual character: it combines both a complex of natural principles and methods and of guiding ethical forms, with no imposed separation of fact and value; but it is also an inexhaustible source, and so on. But the Tao is not beyond the reach of reason (necessarily), even though it is inexpressible (adequately). Other things, such as infinity, are also of this sort. (If Tao were Nothing, which in *a* sense it *is*, many of the puzzling descriptions would be entirely apt.)

Tao is perhaps best explained by going going back to fundamentals. ‘The word *tao*

6 This appropriate image was popularised by James. Under deep pluralism, different determinations of the Whole, different grids, yield different worlds, a *plurality* of worlds, with different domains of objects named or different classes of designated propositions (and so derivatively perhaps with different logics).

consists of one element meaning a head and another meaning to run. It means that on which something or someone goes [that by which a thing becomes what it is], a path or road, later extended to mean "method", "principle'..." (Chan p.6, insert from p.7).

DIAGRAM 2. FUNDAMENTALS OF TAO



To the apt Taoist images of Tao as 'storehouse', 'mother' and 'ancestor', may be added others, such as that of a programmed or guided projectile. Each image helps peel off unwanted associations of others; thus Tao is a great mother without male input; an ancestor without predecessor, a missile without maker, an outputting program without input. Like a program projectile or delivering storehouse, it integrates a complex source, an initial operating program, with a planned course, a natural (and ideal) path.

The great or overarching Tao is a comprehensive source of natural activity; it encapsulates a framework of forms or principles, principles of natural order, both metaphysical and moral. It comprises both dynamic principles (or evolving "laws") of nature and axiological principles guiding conduct. In this representation it invites comparison with Plato's structure of Forms, appropriately neutralised (in the object-theory fashion Reid urged: see JB), or still better, though again neglecting the dynamism of Tao, comparison with the pre-Socratic Logos. But to see overarching Tao as an axiological ontology, after the pattern of Plato's Form theory, would be to import unwarranted Western assumptions. Though Tao is a "great form", and there is no doubt room in the generous object framework for other (unhypostatized) forms, main Platonic forms such as Beauty, Truth and Goodness, do not feature large in the *Tao-te Ching*. They are distinguished, and set rather to the side, in the final chapter (LT 81). Other less Platonically emphasized (or available) forms are more important, such as Simplicity, Frugality and Non-competition, as well as Tao itself, the supreme form, also the One, which supplants the static Good of Plato's scheme and is coupled with a dynamic path component.

Tao as form is part of Tao as *informing* source, which comprehends the class of characterisations of objects e.g. subjectized and individualized forms, taos (these no doubt

relate to forms, ideals or principles, rather as particular essences relate to Platonic forms). Tao as informing source is summed up in such phrases as "The original of everything and out of which all arises." Tao as combined governing principle and source is summed up in such phrases as "the ancestor and mother of all things". The Mother-image provides both a source, and for the form of an object without being that object.⁷ Under the ancestral-image, Tao supplies both the material source and the form, the genetic coding, for existence.

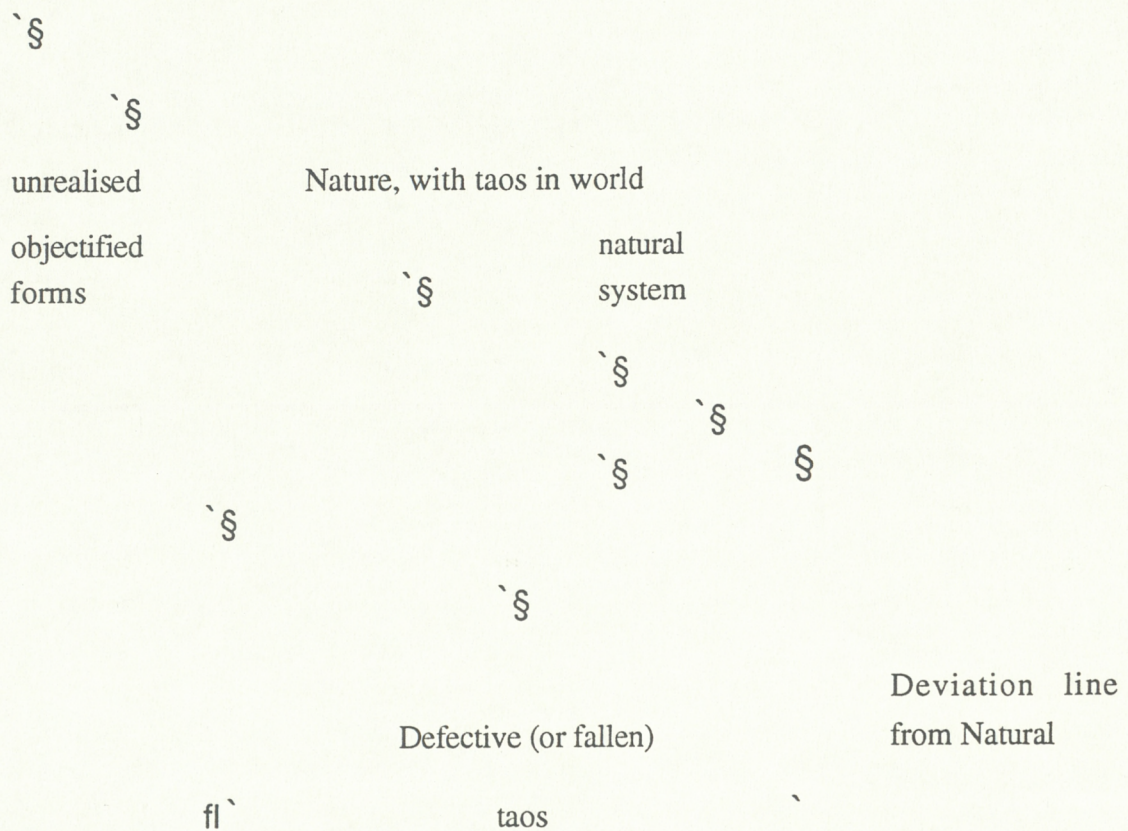
It is evident that Tao is intimately linked with, and concerned with, the natural, and indeed linked with and not above the everyday. But what is the relationship between nature and Tao? Is Tao supra- or super-natural? Tao is certainly not supernatural, and it does not transcend natural things in the fashion of Western supernatural religions; rather Tao both orders and reflects nature. Tao supplies the physical laws that provide physical idealisations (i.e. ideal models) of processes. Tao in this sense is a process and the container and origin of process and the laws of process. Tao is the natural way of the universe (of Heaven and Earth), and super-Tao, also signified as Tao, is the way of the universe and the universe. (Under a computer analogy, Tao is the program of the whole system; it is also, as super-Tao, the program combined with the system, everything). As Great Tao it is certainly simple, all-embracing and one. Getting the hang of its components and their connections is not quite so simple.

7 The persistent Mother image in Lao Tzu has suggested several fanciful interpretations, such as that of a mother-goddess, which are not textually supported. The latest in this fanciful line is a Gaia story.

DIAGRAM 3. SUPER-TAO, OR GREAT TAO, WITH COMPONENTS INTEGRATED

SUPER-TAO

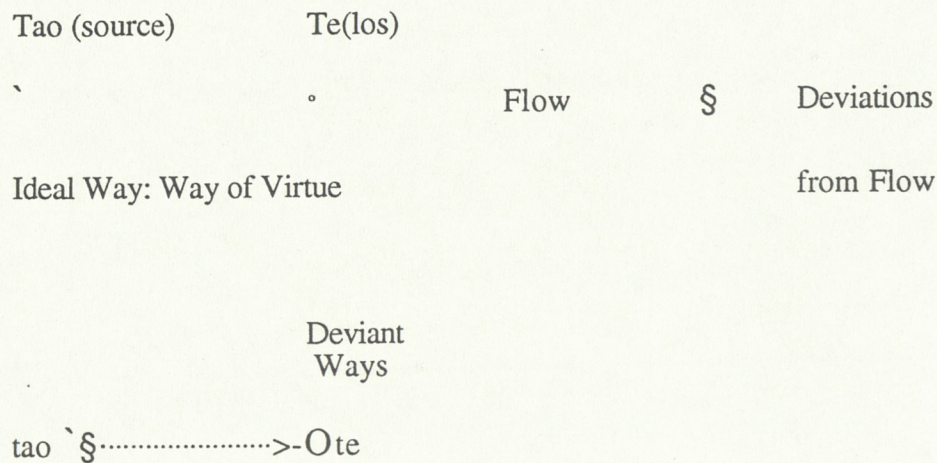
Overarching forms, principles, Way of Nature



As to the status of principles (laws, rules), standard Western categorisations are again exceeded. These principles are not transcendent, governing things externally, but are, so to say, self-supplied, with things self-regulated. Undominated things are naturally self-governing. Nor is it quite accurate to say that 'the Tao is immanent and expressed through the

te $\approx$ *telos*, ideal direction) of things'.⁸ The transcendent/immanent dichotomy fails (as on object-theory), because it presupposes that principles and the Tao exist, either externally or internally; but they do not exist. What is nearer right is that 'Everything has its own nature and each nature is its own ultimate ... then by whom are things produced? They produce themselves, that is all' (Kuo Hsiang, p.328). But *ideally* they proceed according to the Tao-te, the goal directed way of virtue, autonomously.

DIAGRAM 4. TAO-TE PATHS, AND GOING WITH THE NATURAL FLOW
(cf. LT 53).



Laws persist, and perhaps evolve, under the guidance of overarching Tao, while the universe in its rich diversity comes into and goes out of being. Tao thus offers a kind of unity in, or above, diversity. In this regard too, Taoism can be applied to clarify the value scheme of Deep Ecology. For Deep Ecology also values diversity and organic unity in diversity, but lacks the cosmology from which the features derive. The unity lies in a unified tier of principle (matched in part at an upper level of the Deep Ecology pyramid) above the diversity of life processes. The Taoist metaphor of a single block, variously composed of many things, can likewise be applied to fill out Deep Ecology's picture of the ecosphere. However,

8 As Hall claims. *Te*, a fundamental notion in Taoism, is often translated as *virtue*, sometimes *power*; but often *telos* gets the intended item and objective better, as the subsequent text tries to explain. *Te* is not the same as *Tao*. And it is a mistake to *identify* tao, or individualised *Tao*, with *te* (as sometimes suggested; e.g. Chan SB p.178), though they are evidently closely connected, and to a restricted extent (as e.g. in a missile example) one can be derived from the other. While tao gives the source and route `§, *te* supplies the virtuous direction and focus or goal (*telos*) §-O.

the block metaphor has some drawbacks; it tends to suggest a static picture, which is unwarranted. For both Tao and Deep Ecology, universes and ecospheres are, when appropriately stable, in dynamic equilibrium.

Tao is a natural order. Though the phrase "natural order" may seem strange, even contradictory, it is not. The reason is, in part, that the Taoist perception of the world is the reverse of the modern Hobbes-Locke perception of the world. In contrast to European political thought of the mainstream Hobbes-Locke strain, where the state-of-nature is one of chaos or extreme disorder, the Taoist state-of-nature is one of order. A main assumption of Western thought, that political order must be imposed by regulation on an unruly state-of-nature, is thus undercut. A separate imposed political order is not required; the idea that it is rests on mistaken assumptions. Politics can, and should, follow nature. Science and politics can be blended, not sharply separated in the typical Western fashion, where nature is taken to exclude value. Nature presumes value.

Nature is already in order as it normally is, through a unity in diversity which involves a normative component – a principle or recipe for how things "should" be as well as how they are integrally. Values are built into the environment, an integral part of the way of things. By following the values of Tao one enters and comes into contact with the whole environment and into unity with the environment. Tao is a description of how things are and a prescription of how to act in accord with the way they are.

According to Taoism then, by contrast with dominant Western thought which sees the world as extensional, mechanistic and value-neutral (except for its human cargo), the world is both intensional and value-infused. These features extend not merely to the whole, but to components which go into composing the greater whole. These have their programs, or ways, which are integrated into the greater way (somewhat as, but artificially, expert system programs may be organised into grander programs representing super-experts, computer substitutes for the lost "universal men").

The overarching Tao – grand or capital Tao, the program or recipe or Form or whole genetic code – combines many individual ones – lesser or *lower-case* taos – within it. Such a lesser tao, of an individual, system or whatever, is what makes a thing what is properly, a sourced or informed source, a program directed path, a processed output. A tao is a sourced directed object; it is thus a type of object, a dynamic item, which can be represented by a pair comprising a recipe, program or form and a direction or goal-orientation. Accordingly, an individual or local tao (or form) resembles one of Aristotle's individual forms as coupled with a *telos*, which comprises a normative directive. For both Aristotle and Tao there is, in effect,

an "invisible hand" at work. (How did this, such convenient *natural* order come about? That is Tao; another, old and compatible answer is: It evolved.) When things are running properly, the lesser, individual, taos (most conveniently) fit together and operate in accord under the overarching program (cf. diagram 3). If each individual runs according to the program, then the overall program succeeds fully. However, it works even if each individual does not run according to the overarching program, but it has a less ideal result. If each person acts in a correct way a massive net good and great order result. Yet, any attempt to impose order does not bring it about, but is counterproductive. The invisible (natural) hand guides, but the hand cannot be forced.

This picture of order invites comparison with the modern market theory, which claims that maximum effect or benefit is obtained without regulation (other than extensive framework legislation!), and that once regulation is imposed the result is inferior. In principle, the market operates on a set of understood (partly conventional) rules. The rules are known and it is merely a matter of following them. But the market enables dominance by the rich and powerful, and thereby discrimination and the like. Tao, however, is opposed to such dominance; those who follow Tao attempt to refrain from dominating others. But like the market, the rules of conduct are built into the system and any attempt to impose them is counterproductive.

As a result, spontaneity and order are not opposites, but result from the same thing. A strong sense of natural order, of self organisation, of anarchy (in the good sense) enters. Like Buddhism, Tao assents to the maxim, "Do nothing and from unforced order greater order results". If each being is permitted to follow its tao, then the needs of all will be met without coercion. Following the way of Tao, nature emerges as a self-supplying organization. Such convenient natural organisation stands (so far as it occurs!) in need of some further explanation, whether of an internal, evolving sort or of a supernatural sort, as in Neoplatonism where God or the One accomplishes the organisational task. Taoism undermines such latter alternates, and points (in CT) towards an evolutionary explanation.

2. The extend of Tao as agency: non-religion and (non-)morality. God does not occur, and is not needed, in the cosmology, either as an agent, to make things in the universe happen, or as an authority, to regulate things or set moral or legal standards. If He did occur, He would, like other directors and rulers, not be needed, though He could serve as an example. 'But there is no indication of his existence' (CT 2). As in the socio-political sphere, direction by a overseer or ruler is otiose, and only exemplary. In particular, God is not required to start or wind the universe up. 'Everything in the world creates itself without the

direction of any creator. Since things create themselves they are unconditioned. This is the norm of the universe.'⁹

The Tao is not a supernatural personal agency; it is not supernatural, it is certainly not personal, and it is only in a stretched sense "agency". If the Tao includes all-encompassing natural order – a unity in diversity – in which the tao of each is ideally in harmony with the whole, then there is no need to posit a super-Being. Each being follows its course in the whole. Moreover, the appeal to a superpersonal authority, exalted example, or the like, on the one side, or to ethics, on the other, is needed only when people have moved away from the Tao. Everything will work well if a community lives according to the Tao. Thus deontic features are brought in only at disequilibrium – an interesting, but tricky, position. Then too, in formulating norms, appeal is back to framework from which people have diverged.

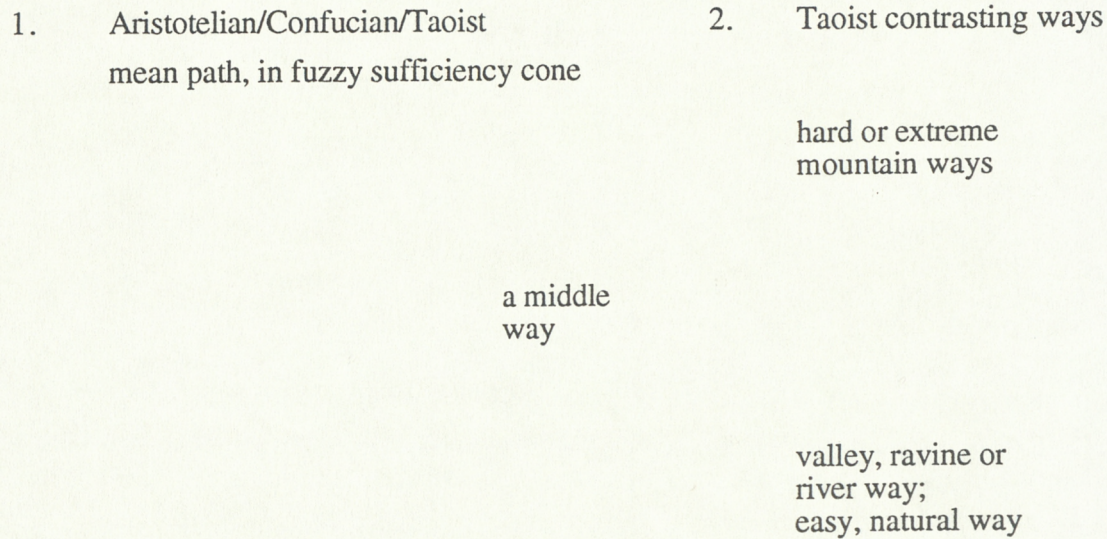
In politics, as in morals, it is deviation from the natural state that represents the problem, quite in contrast again to European political thought of the Hobbes-Locke strain, where the state-of-nature is one of extreme disorder (nasty, brutish, short, etc.). Such a state-of-nature is not at all a Taoist natural state; by contrast with mainstream thought, nineteenth century European anarchism adopts a position very similar to Taoism.¹⁰

It is revealing to compare the Taoist picture of deviation from a natural state with Aristotelian model of deviation from the mean, which provides the norm (cf. diagram 4). On the Aristotelian model, the end of all things is seeking well-being, to be achieved by following the Mean. This involves adhering to the Mean in an active rational fashion. Rationality is tied to seeking, to the means. Tao does not require rationality. Tao is sought passively, by letting happen, not actively, by forced efficiency, whereas on the Aristotelian account, the search and aim for the good is active.

9 Kao Hsiang, *Commentary on Chuan Tsu*, 330-1. When Hall and others try to argue (like Neo-Taoists) that the Taoist totality is without a beginning – contrary to Hall's other material about Being coming from Nonbeing – what they actually present, and mean, is: without a *creative* beginning. And that is right: there is no *Creatio ex nihilo* as per Genesis. But it is false that there is no cosmogony. There is; and while there is no creation, a making by someone, there is a beginning; see e.g. SB, p.202.

10 In this respect, Hall is right off track (in the last sentence of his paragraph 1). The Taoist point is that naturalness is not such a prominent feature of human affairs, because of the imposition of excess laws, regulation, etc. Taoist sensibility is only bizarre from an erroneous dominant paradigm perspective.

DIAGRAM 5. TAOIST MIDDLE/CENTRAL/LITTLE-ACTION WAYS



Though the ancient transcultural doctrine of the mean, of a middle way, appears explicitly in *Lao Tzu* (e.g. 77, also 29), that middle path is arrived at, and taken, differently. The Taoist route is an easy no-action route, a valley way, a path of weakness and little resistance, in line with the general account of following Tao and living and faring well.

Tao supplies a set of suggestions and prescriptions for how to live well, as well as a parallel (and controlling) set of propositions about how things happen and proceed ideally. Of course there is a moral purpose in *Lao Tzu*; the moral purpose is a central one alongside, and inseparable from, the metaphysical purpose, the acquiring of an account of “ultimate reality”. To what extent then is Taoism open to the accusation of amorality? Since axiology is a crucial part of the world view – evaluations and commendations are freely and extensively offered in the texts – it is not amoral in a generous sense. But the treatment of deontic principles, and of rules of conduct generally is very different. Deontics get into the picture only when there is a lapse or deviation from an ideal natural state (from a *proper* course).

‘When the Great Tao declined, the doctrine of humanity and righteousness arose’ (LT 18). It depends then, on what counts as “moral” and “amoral”. Certainly there are approved and implicitly recommended life-styles, though there are few “oughts” and no (Confucian-Kantian) lists of duties. Moreover, unless the preferred Taoist lifestyle *were* merely recommended, not required, Taoism would fall down as insufficiently pluralistic.

3. On the Taoist style of life; an environmental lifestyle. According to *Lao Tzu*, there are some basic elements to living well, for instance ‘three treasures’ (LT 67; but different overlapping lists are presented, e.g. LT 19).

1. Deep love – which can also be taken to involve compassion, pity, commiseration, care, respect and regard, and which includes something close to empathy, deep-penetrating empathy. Sympathy, a main linkage of the European “Enlightenment”, does not however capture what is involved: sympathy alone would be too egoistical for Taoism, as it is for Deep Ecology. Deep love is part of the notion of genuine relatedness, not a one-sided “relatedness” or possessiveness (which Taoism rejects).

2. Frugality - a renunciation of excess. But frugality is not impoverishment. Needs are met adequately without deprivation or excess.

3. Modesty or humility - not to dare to be ahead of the world, not to take the lead. In Taoism there is no competitive requirement, but the opposite; such Western desiderata lapse. Rather, one gives up trying to be on top of the pile, or even being in a faster lane. In a Taoist society there are no conspicuous tall poppies.

Much else connects with or follows in a loose way, it is assumed, from these three virtues; for instance, courage from deep love, generosity from frugality, a kind of leadership from humility. The arguments for those surprising derivations go like this: ‘deep love helps one to aim in the case of attack,/And to be firm in the case of defence’ (LT 67). Earlier (LT 19) it is taken that proper abandonment of humanistic ethics will mean a return to (what the ethics inadmissibly substitutes for) deep love, a basic valuational relation. But in place of frugality, goes a discarding of profit, and in place of humility an abandonment of conscious sageliness and discarding of immodest (or conventional) wisdom. These changes are, astonishingly, said to be rather superficial and inadequate; so further desiderata, commonly read out of the “treasures”, are adduced: ‘Manifest plainness/ embrace simplicity/ reduce selfishness/have few desires’ (LT 19). Another element, beyond the three of relatedness, frugality, and not daring to be ahead, is adaptability or spontaneity. This complements the further desiderata.

Evidently main ingredients for a simple environmentally sound life-style are highly commended. Lao Tzu might almost have been writing an introduction for Callenbach's environmental handbook, *Living Poor with Style*, or even for Pausacker and Andrews' *Living Better with Less*. In Chang Tzu, the pure person is a deep environmentalist:— She is a ‘companion’ of Nature and ‘does not attempt to interfere with it by imposing the way of man upon it’. Her goal is ‘spiritual emancipation and peace’ and derivatively freedom; and her route is ‘through knowing the capacity and limitations of one's own nature and adapting it to the universal process of transformation’ and thus to the environment (Chan SB p.177).

In complementary fashion, opposite "virtues", common in anti-environmental life-styles are condemned. The Western drives to power, fame, competition, possessions, excess commodities, useless (small) knowledge are rejected by Taoism (along with "Mans Affairs"). Thus entrepreneurial activity in business, and also in professional and academic affairs (as well as business itself), gets decidedly discouraged. The good life naturally reduces ambitions and desires and avoids competition. Competition is connected with self-assertion and aggressive action. Taoism, while not neglecting limited natural competition, passes aspersions on both, thus fitting neatly with Deep Ecology's prescription for environmental lifestyle and (supposedly derived) policy of non-violence. In place of the Enlightenment and mainstream economic virtue of competition appears the 'virtue of non-competition' (LT 68). Arguments against competition can be developed from other doctrines of Taoism. For example, competition often requires forced or artificial action; thus it violates the doctrine of *wu-wei* (non-action), competition is deviant, evidencing deviation from one's tao. The penalty for such deviation from the path is not spelled out in Deep Ecology, but it is in Taoism. Another way of putting it (suggested by Clark) is that in competition external rival standards are imposed on Tao, presumably with electrifying results. In any case, according to Taoism, there is no merit in trying to place oneself above another. So there is no value in competition. Fortunately competition can be reduced. If a person does not compete then the world cannot compete with him.

A way of life is depicted, based on love, respect and compassion for all things, attuned to what is essential, shedding what is unnecessary, where simplicity and frugality are sought, and excess avoided. This includes, in a nutshell, voluntary simplicity of a deep sort. In Deep Ecology the same idea appears, partly sloganised as "simple in means; rich in ends". Simplicity is not the impoverished life of one who seeks escape. Taoism goes much further in disparaging scarce material means. Do not exact the worth, so that people compete. Do not value rare treasure, so that people do not steal. Gross wealth and prestige are rejected; they are vanities and vexations. But not all is vanity: living well is not.

It is a very natural inference, then, from the account of living well to the suggestion that Tao offers a deep form of voluntary simplicity. Voluntary simplicity is a fuzzy notion.¹¹

11 As Elgin's very profuse account reveals. Strictly much further detail is called for here: namely, a set of conditions is needed, and also elaboration of the Taoist form of frugality, and then connection of the conditions with the three basic elements of Tao – frugality, deep relatedness, and not daring to be ahead in the world.

Voluntary simplicity can initially be explained through its two obvious components, simplicity and its voluntary adoption. Simplicity connects with, and is often equated with frugality, as elaborated in Taoism. But whether or not simplicity is obtained from frugality or other Taoist virtues, it plays a direct and important part in the theory, and is in fact modelled, like its metaphysical counterpart, the unconceptualised Whole, by the uncarved block, a central Gestalt of the theory. The block symbolises unity, simplicity and naturalness not spoiled by artifice, metaphysically the wholeness and unity of Tao before conceptual carving, and ethically the wholesome straightforward non-devious life under Te, the 'simple life that is free from cunning and cleverness, is not devoted to the pursuit of profit or marked by hypocritical humanity and righteousness, but is characterised by plainness, tranquility, and purity' (Chan p.14). As to voluntariness, people have a *choice* of selecting the way of Tao rather than one of the deviant ways. It is a choice of recipes – frugal vs. excess, relatedness vs. non-relatedness, tall poppies vs. not daring to be ahead. But one does not attempt to force one's way onto the correct path. To hyperactively seek the path is a deviation in itself. It is deontic to speak of a *requirement* to find the correct path.

4. Following Tao, non-action, Te and Self-realization. Part of the Taoist route to an environmental lifestyle and to "self-realization" consists in acquiring the practice of non-action, in terms of non-assertion, non-aggression, non-destruction, etc. *Wu-wei*, commonly translated as 'non-action', is thereby rendered a dialectic notion, for it does not exclude action and in a sense is action. To avoid such dialectical overtones, *wu-wei* is sometimes rendered 'not acting wilfully' or 'not acting artificially' or 'acting naturally'; it is better transcribed as 'without forcing' or 'no forced (or coercive) action'.¹² Construed in this fashion, *wu-wei* is not an extraneous awkward addition to Taoism, but an integral part, which emerges from other features of the theory, namely those of following natural low-action ways. For non-action is the "activity" of letting one's tao drift or flow into line with the overall Tao (so arrows in diagram 3 are aligned). What is commended is, in the correct circumstances, pacific action, of letting happen (e.g. letting die), as opposed to aggressive, extraverted action (e.g. killing), forced action upsetting natural ways. Similarly for other Nō-nos; the "no

12 An illuminating philological comparison of *wu-wei* activity with *anarchism* is developed by Ames, pp.342-3. 'The sympathy between [them] lies in their common reference to activity performed in the absence of coercively determined constraints ...'. As Ames observes, the comparison operates not only at the political and ethical levels, but bears upon cosmology also, negating a coercive boss or planner in the beginning of things. For an integrated treatment of *wu*-principles, which generally reject forms of imposition and control, see Hall pp.59-60.

desires" directive, for instance, is a piquant shorthand for 'no impure desires' (Chan p.13), i.e. for no unsatisfactory or anti-te desires. Non-action accordingly does not require literally no action, but only actions in accord with ideal nature, so ruling out actions contrary to undisturbed Tao. It may appear that perennial problems, alleged to haunt Taoism (and intensified in Stoicism), are induced. For example, if all is Tao, and Tao is natural, how can there be unnatural activity? Or differently, if nothing can depart from Tao, how can there be unspontaneous actions, or any violation of *wu-wei*? Tao, however, is a source which only *points* in an ideal, natural, direction. It does not *determine* all individual paths, which can deviate from ideal or natural paths. Thus deviant activity is not excluded, unspontaneous and ill-organised activity by individuals is in no way ruled out; and forced, coercive and nature-destroying activities are all too common.¹³

Non-action as policy generally implies non-interference, when things have not been damagingly disturbed. It implies letting things take their own natural course; letting Being be, as Deep Ecologists would say, with basically "hands off" practice and management. Unforced action in practice is well illustrated by examples of going with the flow (cf. diagram 4). One main example of going with the flow is cutting meat. The Chef does not encounter bones. He takes the meat apart effortlessly in the same way that an athlete does things effortlessly, with little waste action. Going with the flow can however involve a lot of activity, as with the man swimming easily in a raging torrent below the waterfall, or as in sailing and trimming to the wind. At a personal level, non-action lies in such things as not striving to put oneself above others, in foregoing competition, in simplicity, frugality, and adherence to the mean. Evidently this removes a range of normally accepted social activities. Flexibility, and suppleness, and even weakness, belong to the centre (or mean), to the valley way. In Tao these qualities are associated with life; the inflexible and the rigid are associated with the dead. This can be visualized as a range of activities associated with the process of coming into being and passing out of being, in which the pre-life and the post-life are dead. The central time, like the centre, is flexible and supple; not hard, stiff and inflexible. All this carries a social message as well as an individual one.

After things reach their prime they grow old, which means they become contrary to Tao. What is contrary to Tao soon perishes. After prime a thing moves towards rigidity.

13 When 'all activities follow their specific principles, that is nature' (SB p.202); deviation from Nature accordingly occurs, namely when some activities do not follow their principles. As for destruction, 'Do not let man destroy Nature' (SB p.207).

But Taoism does not accept Western cultural notions of primeness. Primeness is not a matter of a certain juvenile physical or sporting prowess or peak. It takes a long time to reach a practice approximating Tao. Socrates died in his prime, although by Western standards he was an old man. An important, but retrograde, cultural shift has occurred in modern Western culture. The doyens of Deep Ecology are old(er) men by Western standards.

A supreme goal in Deep Ecology, both for individuals and systems, societies and such like, is self-realisation (again capitalised in the overall case). Self-realisation is a modern European idea, not found in Taoism, and indeed incompatible with it and all older non-maximizing wisdoms which incorporate theories of adhering to the Mean. For Self-realisation, as understood and explained (of course the account could ahistorically be amended to a satisizing one), is a maximizing prescription applied to the aggregated interests of separate self, inflation of a typically egoistic concept not found in Taoism. But although Deep Ecology's ideal of Self-realisation would be rightly queried in Taoism, there is a group of associated goals to be found in Taoism: namely, attaining enlightenment and tranquility, following Tao, cultivation of *te*; and the contrast between self-realisation and Self-realisation parallels that between *te* and *Te*, great *te*. Since 'the main objective of the [*Lao Tzu*] is the cultivation of virtue or *te*' (Chan p.11), it is *te* that displaces self-realisation on the Taoist scheme.

Complementary to Tao is *Te*, and to tao is *te*. Whereas tao is the directed source of a thing, *te* is the matching *goal-directed developing* or unfolding of a thing. It is a directed and *appraised* (in principle favourably) developing, perfecting; hence the standard translation of *te* as 'virtue'. Because of its potentiality to reach a (good) goal, a rival translation as 'power' has some currency; it is a directed force *for* good (or evil). The program of tao supplies the direction of matching *te*. So a thing can follow its tao (and thereby follow Tao) by cultivating *te*, by practising positive virtue, by choosing a lifestyle of deep simplicity. The directives for a good individual life are accordingly commonly given in terms of individual *te*, and it is *te* (rather than Tao) that generally appears individualised.

As self-realisation in Deep Ecology is not restricted to individuals, so *te* and tao are not. The society as well as the individual has a tao and a matching *te*. Taoism is neither individualistic nor atomistic, but systemic and holistic. Thus groups or societies have their own taos and the collection is related to the overall Tao. Social insects perhaps provide a conspicuous example of the social tao. The example transfers to overly rigid social forms, such as bureaucracies, and also to military societies which are obsessed with security. (Taoism is fairly lateralist in its thinking, with much inferential movement by association.)

But security is not obtained by being secure as in military security, which is characteristically a fortified security. In peace people are open to danger but secure in another sense. The materialist world, excessively propped up by possessions, Taoism treats with disdain; it does not equate security with material security.

Each being has its own tao, its own ideal naturally-programmed path of self-development or unfolding. Correspondingly, there is an immanent telos, a te, a goal-directed virtuous developing, for each thing. By each following its own nature, all follow nature. Our self-development does not then interfere damagingly with your self-development. How does this happen? Through natural (again invisible) inter-organisation, my proper self-development cannot impede your proper self-development. Taoism is decidedly short on details of such mutual adjustment and harmonious integration, but certain it happens naturally – as it may, for instance, through the evolution of co-operation.¹⁴ So there is, or need be, no vacillation between following one's own path and taking care not to interfere with the paths of others, between individualistic and relational paths. Perhaps in Taoism the modern problems are skirted rather than solved. But the Taoist result is integration, a harmonious combination of plans, without domination, whereas the pattern of Western relations operates (as in Hegel) through hierarchical ordering and domination.

5. Anti-patriarchal aspects: feminism, powerlessness, peace. Taoism advances other models, than those concerning age, which are strange by entrenched Western standards – such as demotion of strength and power, and the place and importance ascribed to characteristically feminine and child-like elements in living well and achieving Taoist self-realisation, te. It was prepared for ecofeminism in a way that Deep Ecology was not. Taoism is highly critical of patriarchy, accepting in effect main anti-chauvinistic themes of ecofeminism. By contrast, there has been continuing conflict between Deep Ecology and ecofeminism. In its formative programmatic days Deep Ecology did not recognise legitimate feminine aspirations or sexual domination, and it took no due account of the organising theme

14 One resolution of this problem can now make a good start with Axelrod's investigations of evolving cooperation.

Cooperation can begin with small clusters. It can thrive with rules that are nice, provokable, and somewhat forgiving. And once established in a population, individuals using such discriminating strategies can protect themselves from invasion. The overall level of cooperation tends to go up and not down. In other words, the machinery for the evolution of cooperation contains a ratchet (Axelrod p.177).

of ecofeminism, the striking parallel between the domination of women and the domination of nature. But Taoism even incorporates an interesting early form of affirmative action. In Taoism, the traditional Chinese balance between *yang* and *yin* swings, when in disequilibrium it does, towards the *yin*. Quite in contrast with the Western paradigm, one properly aims at *yin* (which represents the complex of supposedly feminine features) rather than at *yang* (symbolising, among other things, the masculine complex).

There is an emphasis on female and child-like, features, and, as in *yin-yang* dovetailing, integration of gender features. There is, nonetheless, some stereotyping of male and female features in Tao (as there is generally in feminism itself), with males allegedly active and female weaker and more passive. It is in this way that the emphasis on *yin* is reached, from desiderata such as humility and weakness. Still, though historic Taoism hardly admits of degendering, rigidly defined sex roles are alien to Tao sensibilities. People develop according to their own tao. They can develop typically male, or female, features or features of both. One who rigidly accounts these masculine and feminine features, speaks from without the framework of Tao. Historically, where it began to be put into practice, Taoism worked for sexual freedom and liberation of women.

The Child also serves as a model (LT 55), and there are certain components of Childhood liberation in Taoism: in the emphasis on freedom, in the attack on learning and schooling, and so on. The reason the child is a model is because it has spontaneity, it is direct and natural, and lacks power or strength. Tao rejects institutions and societies based on power. Infants are not ruled by a longing for power, instead all actions are spontaneous.

Active force, like power, is in general castigated. To force growth is deviant, destroying harmony. To stop growth is deviant. "For the mind to employ the vital force without restraint means violence" (replacing 'mind' with intentionality would give a better picture of what is meant). There is a significant difference between force and violence. To employ intentionally destructive force is to do violence. To so force things is condemned. To remain in harmony with things one does not so force things or practice violence. There is a non-interference principle at work, which also indicates types of non-interference that are excluded.

Not only is the Taoist opposition to violence well-known, but there is a blistering attack on militarism and warfare in *Lao Tzu* (e.g. LT 31, 30, 46); 'war is a symptom of the decline of man' (Chan p.5). Given the hostility to war, it has been regarded as passing strange, not to say puzzling, that Lao Tzu sketches military tactics and other allegedly devious political strategies. The strategies are however but application of Taoist principles and techniques to

warfare, politics and elsewhere. Nothing excludes application of these techniques to what are accounted, in general, unnecessary evils (which must sometimes, on other Taoist grounds, be countered). Nor, to meet the main criticism, need any deceit or deviousness be involved; nor is it. The legalist tactic, 'In order to grasp, it is necessary first to give' (LT 36), is said to involve 'an element of deceit' 'undeniably', and 'worse' is 'morally questionable' (Chan p.17). But in order for me to grasp your hand in a normal handshake, it is necessary first for me to give my hand. There is no deceit here, nothing morally questionable. All the tactics permit of benign construals, of a Taoist kind. Consider, for instance, 'In order to contract, it is necessary first to expand' (LT 36). In order to bend a copper pipe to the intended angle, it is better to bend it first further than required. The transformation of water to ice (both favoured natural items for symbolic purposes) neatly illustrates the Taoist principle (which is however hardly necessary), and shows softness and weakness turned hardness and strength.

6. Environmental theory and practice, and environmental problems and difficulties, such as quietism and security. As on deeper ecological theories, traditional Western models for human relations to the natural world are one and all rejected. The dominant view, of domination, of human dominion over the earth and its other inhabitants, is not merely roundly and soundly rejected; the metaphysical creationist base and the superiority myths upon which it is regularly founded are also removed. Therewith also the bases for the lesser, and rather more benign, Western models are also undercut. There is no greater boss or purpose for humans to serve or act as steward to; besides stewardship, which is both hierarchical and implicitly patriarchal in cast, typically involves active interference in producing products. The idea of perfecting nature also implies active interference, when however nature is more or less in order as it is, and requires no "perfecting". Thus stewardship and perfectionist views fall along with domination and dominion.

Taoism offers instead a non-interference model for relations to nature, a letting-be approach, with "hands off" management and associated lifestyles, several features of which we have already glimpsed. A most striking feature of Taoism is its environmental depth, its strong opposition to then prevailing (and still prevailing) humanism and human chauvinism.

Heaven and earth are not humane
They regard all things as straw dogs [i.e. rather worthless strict ritual objects].
The sage is not humane [or human chauvinist].
He regards all people as straw dogs (LT.5).

Because of such tough pronouncements, reiterated and reinforced in Chang Tzu (e.g. CT. 2), Taoism is sometimes said to be predicated on anti-humanism. But it is not 'a dehumanizing

philosophy', it does not deny compassion; what transpires is that concern and value are not confined to humans or their affairs, but

include the natural and the metaphysical. The human is no longer the criterion of what is good or true. The traditional idea that a supreme supernatural being ... is the ruler of the universe is replaced by the doctrine that the universe exists and operates by itself. When [Lao Tzu] says that "Heaven and Earth are not humane", he means in a narrow sense that they are *impartial*, but in a broader sense that Nature is no longer governed according to *human standards* ... In one stroke he removes Heaven [or God] and man as the standards of things and replaces them with Nature (Chan p.10, italics added; also p.107).

What is rejected with the rejection of humanism and humanistic ethics is human chauvinism. For being "humane" means accepting the chauvinistic assumptions of conventional society and remaining within the narrow sphere of interests of the human species. There is no unbridgeable gulf between humans and other creatures such as Western thought has tried to manufacture. 'Put a halter around the horse's head and put a string through the cow's nose, that is man' (SB p.207). In place of humanism, Taoism adopts a doctrine of impartiality. 'Embrace all things without inclining to this way or that way' (SB p.206). He who is enlightened 'is impartial' (LT 6); 'he has no partial love for anyone' (SB p.201) he does not bestow undue or special favours upon humans; he aims to be one with Nature.

Impartiality does not imply equality. Despite the received heading of chapter 2 of the *Chang Tzu*, 'the equality of all things' (the literal 'levelling all things' is nearer the mark), and the standard inference to some Taoist doctrine of parity, no simplistic and difficult theme of equal value of all things is ventured – nor any theme of parity for some favoured subclass thereof such as living things. (Though there is some accent on prime life, there is not the same stress on *life* in Taoism that there is in Deep Ecology, nor the bizarre extension of "life" to include waterfalls, mountains and other striking natural objects.) What is offered, instead of much in the way elucidation of impartiality, is (again like deeper ecological theory) a doctrine of identification. Wide identification and wide solidarity does promote impartiality and counter chauvinism. Egoism, for instance, involves discounting all but oneself, humanism all but humans, and requires a species solidarity with human things. But wider identification puts a stop to such discounting (e.g. in favour of one's own or species's interests, as exhausting value) and to such class-restricted solidarity. For wider identification reveals that interests, desires, values and so forth, are not so individual or class restricted. Many exquisite examples of identification, and the processes by which it may be achieved, are developed, e.g. with a butterfly, by dream access (SB p.190), with rivers and seas, and wider again, by the proper meditative process, with the dusty world – 'Become one with the dusty world/ This is called profound identification' (LT 56, also 4) – and perhaps wider yet, and

ultimate, with ideal Nature, and thus in complete accord with Tao (e.g. LT 16).

No less striking than the criticism of humanism, Taoism makes similar sort of attack on traditional education and on the accumulation of knowledge. The case against traditional education, especially rote "learning", is straightforward; it reinforces entrenched practices and prejudices, e.g. those of humanism. The criticism does not of course imply that there would be no regular learning or habituation processor, such as those encouraged traditional indoctrination methods. More perplexing is the attack on knowledge acquisition, though in part it is of the same sort, against an entrenched knowledge in the hands of a power group. But, in an organic society, knowledge is integrated into the community and not rarified into a commodity held or controlled by a priesthood or a class of intellectuals or literati. Knowledge is power; such power is removed from the hands of a few by making it a community good. This goes beyond Deep Ecology, in that it questions and rejects experts. Indeed in its criticism of schooling, narrow expertise, and the like, Taoism resembles and anticipates the position taken by Illich rather than features of Deep Ecology. The move against informational power also points to the difference between wisdom (not unequivocally approved) and knowledge, a difference recorded in Taoism as in most older wisdom. However one of the indicated Taoist arguments against mere knowledge illustrates an *all-to-any* fallacy. We can't reasonably (or possibly) aim for all knowledge – by the unlimited objective or limited beings argument (see CT 2) – so we can't reasonably aim for any, and shouldn't, so it appears to be suggested. Another line of argument looks more promising. Life has a limit, but knowledge is without limit. For the limited to pursue the unlimited is futile. However the argument only reveals limits to the accumulation of knowledge, not its pointlessness or undesirability. In any case, in the end the superficially anti-intellectual trend of Taoism shifts ground; it is directed against other targets than pure knowledge: against slickness and cleverness, against devious and crafty uses of knowledge (LT 3), against counter-productive acquiring of knowledge or cunning, and its teaching. The messy situation is tidied up a bit in the *Chang Tzu*, where an apposite distinction is made between *small* knowledge, the castigated sorts, which is inquisitive, partial, discriminative or merely analytic, and *great* knowledge, which is 'leisurely and at ease', comprehensive, extensive, and synthetic (cf. Chan p.20). Even so, original Taoism hardly seems to cater for adequate access of information, and the removal of (perhaps debilitating) ignorance, concerning health and welfare, careful and damaging practices, choices and alternatives.

The critique of small knowledge and narrow expertise extends to encompass a critique of technology. In Taoism, technology was assigned a very limited role at best. (Hence, *one* of the complex reasons for the delayed development of technology in China.) Certain forms

of technology were, if not rejected outright (as Clark contends), at least strongly discouraged. Thus, 'Even if there are ships and carriages, none will ride in them. Even if there are arrows and weapons, none will display them' (LT 80).¹⁵ More generally, while high and dangerous technology is set aside, even more appropriate technology cannot be accepted uncritically. Lao Tzu recognized clearly that even low impact technology may destroy human practices and conventions constructive to a community. Nor was the connection of technology with population neglected. Given a small country and few inhabitants, if provided with a labour-saving device he would not use it. There are dominating and non-dominating forms of technology. There is enjoined an avoidance of artificial wants and desires, and correspondingly a shunning of replacing labour with nothing at all. Taoism exhibits a firmer grasp of some of the problems of technology, even more appropriate labour-saving technology, than recent positions like Deep Ecology.¹⁶ The Taoist approach also demolishes the so-called iron law of technology, that there is no stopping technology or its progress; whatever the merits of the "Law" (they are not so conspicuous), Taoism reveals that such social laws are highly paradigm-dependent, and do not withstand transfer from the dominant Western paradigm everywhere else.

Many other elements of a sensitive and sophisticated ecological position feature in Taoism. There is an elaborate and sensitive account of Nature, from which it emerges plainly that Nature is not a mere instrument or means for other ends and not a resource, but something of great value in and for itself. Nature is something to be cherished, allowed to take its own course, not to be interfered with or destroyed by humans. Indeed the dominant view is reversed; value for humans is achieved above all by identification with Nature, and by

15 Some verses of LT, of which this one example, support a rival, sinister, interpretation. According to this sinister interpretation (pointed out to us by David Garrett, a student at the University of Auckland), the LT represents not what it has been taken to be, but a work addressed, like Machiavelli's *The Prince*, to a Prince, on how to pacify and control the people. Thus weapons, though held and sharpened, will not be displayed; wealth, though inequitably distributed, will not be shown; the people will be kept ignorant, through lack of information and education; and so on. Fortunately many other verses tell decisively enough against this interpretation. In particular, Taoism denies the need for a Ruler. While under satisfactory arrangements there will be those who are much better attuned to Tao, even sages, they are in position to rule as to impose upon others. Moreover should they endeavour to do so, they would jeopardise or negate their own accord with Tao. Authoritarian rule Machiavelli-style is decidedly politically counterproductive.

16 The claim promoted recently that Taoism is an evident home for alternative technology, and prescribes as much, is rather naive in the light of Taoist texts.

following natural ways. (Paradoxical reversal is a feature of Taoism; even castigated Western aims, such as leadership, fame and so on, are in fact achieved, when they are, not by direct aim, but by letting the reverse happen. So it is with what control of Nature is required; non-intervention and non-action is the approach. Sufficient control is gained, it is said, when assertive attempts to impose it are abandoned.) While such concepts as bioregionalism is not to be encountered in explicit forms in Taoism, their bases and many other recently fashionable environmental ideas are: living in place is certainly present (LT 80); doing things locally and remaining local, while being attuned to the universe and retaining global connections, is certainly advocated, underwriting the Deep Ecology maxim of "think globally, act locally".

While there is then very much in Taoism that fits easily and revealingly with deeper environmental theories, Taoism also leaves puzzles or points to residual problems. Not all the supposed problems are however genuine; and not all the puzzles are bequeathed to contemporary theory. Illustrating both is the problem of quietism, which is at bottom the issue of reconciling "non-action" with environmental and social improvement and action. How would a Taoist resistance against depredation, a Taoist defence of environment go, and fare, given its strong (alleged) emphasis on 'don't bother'? In-built harmony and quietism do not allow sufficiently for conflict. In part there is only a problem because of misrepresentation of Taoism, which is not committed to a "don't bother" attitude to environmental destruction: quite to the contrary, humans should not be allowed to destroy nature. Furthermore, there are many Taoist tactics and techniques, using weakness to overcome strength, letting the flow of nature demolish the forces of environmental destruction, and the like, which can be applied in environmental resistance.¹⁷ Quietism is accordingly a misrepresentation of the practice, and something of a misnomer.

How can Tao work in a world where there is scarcity almost everywhere? Very simply, Taoism holds that there is no genuine problem of plentitude; things are not scarce, there is an abundant outpouring from nature. There is scarcity only because of violations of the requirements of Tao (rather as some claim there is food scarcity even now; with present gigantic human populations, only because of politico-economic mismanagement). Tao will serve to restore plentitude (LT 77). Rather than a collection of scarce resources, Nature is represented as an virtually infinite storehouse of boundless wealth.

17 Use of the power of water affords a prime example; cf LT 15. No-action adaptations of old Chinese martial arts and strategies presumably offer more direct methods of defence and resistance.

Does Tao allow for the prospect and problems of too many people? Can the greater Tao keep pace with the requirements of many too many individual taos, even if those individual requirements are in line with the greater Tao?¹⁸ No doubt in those times, and most historical times when epidemics and plagues were almost as regular as droughts, when evolution still operated on human species, there wasn't more than a hypothetical or remote future problem. It seems plain however that Taoism did not face the environmental problems such as those of too many people and incremental resource degradation. The texts say little about soil degradation and deforestation, long major environmental problems in China. By contrast, in the West, Plato was properly concerned about deforestation of Greece. Nor does Taoism have much to offer directly on main contemporary issues of animal liberation, species loss, urban disgustification, and so forth, though some of the problems are hardly new. Historic Taoism too was a product of its times, adjusted to what were seen as problems.

7. The extent of political anarchism: hierarchy, domination, and rulers in Taoism. In looking to Taoism for political illumination, an early query is likely to be: To what (damaging) extent is Taoism, and the work of Lao Tzu in particular, anarchistic? It explicitly addresses a ruler, and takes for granted the existence of a state. But the format of the *Lao Tzu* may have been obligatory; for Taoism also hopes for "the absence of princes". Nonetheless, overtly, Taoism is not anarchistic. But although literally archist, almost everything in the work corresponds to anarchist sentiments, and it has struck responsive chords in anarchists. Not surprisingly then, some have argued that, despite appearances, the work is anarchistic, and disposes of the state and the ruler 'when taken in a political sense' (thus Clark). What has happened here is that anarchism is confused with an important variant, *anakyrisism* meaning practice, policy and so on *without domination*. Taoism sketches an early version of monarchically organised anakyrisism; Clark (in his book) a late version of ecological anakyrisism.

If Taoism assumes a ruler then it is open to the charge of not being a suitably natural way – unless there is a no-hands ruler. But a satisfactory ruler does not coerce, and in fact does no regulation. It seems clear that Lao Tzu assumes a monarchical style of society without coercion. The basic idea is that it is alright (if maybe costly) to have or inherit a perhaps superfluous ruler, so long as there is no coercion. The "ruler" is merely a planner, a

18 It is tempting to speculate that the greater Tao would serve to limit the number of actual individual taos, as certainly happened in most historic times. On a market model, supply and demand would be on a natural parity.

guide, an example. "Laws" are not backed up with coercion. Carving the block coercively is seen as counterproductively breaking up the community.

Control or domination breaks the natural order of society, coercion removes the basic elements of voluntary simplicity; they are appropriately met with resistance. Government is said to be a sort of disorder. Government is indeed a main source of disorder, where government means coercive government. People are difficult to keep in order because those above interfere. Indeed this is the only reason they are difficult to keep in order (LT 57 and 58). The more laws there are, the more disorder is possible, the more disorder there is. The more ways order is attempted, and more ways there are to have disorder.

Natural order is the way, the recommended way. Imposed order is counterproductive. There is reciprocal resistance to the imposition of deviant order. This would hold even if social organisers tried to impose Tao itself. To attempt to impose it would be to go astray. Such points help to explain why little satisfactory detail is given on social and political organisation. For the requisite organisation, such as it is, follows natural patterns and natural social structures (whichever they are). No doubt details would be (in the style of Aristotelian ethics) largely descriptive of what happens in cases where social affairs were functioning well. Even so, rather more needs to be said about how society accommodates "deviants" of various sorts, as to how unsocial and unenvironmental activities are curtailed, what support structures natural arrangements afford, and so on. Of course these things are attended to locally by society, not by a remote and mostly indifferent state. As in modern anarchism, an important distinction is taken for granted between (local) society and the state or empire. (By contrast, in contemporary texts, especially those of economic orientation, the state is often conflated with society, social roles are transferred to the state, and it is even claimed that what society wants is what the state does!) In Taoism, as in nineteenth century social anarchism, society functions along natural lines; the state is essentially otiose. Society is self-regulating. No doubt small markets that do not yield excess profits flourish, no doubt craftspeople abound and live well but not extravagantly, no doubt local people make inputs to the arrangements of their social affairs. Most of these sorts of background details go largely unstated. But some significant features of social practice are revealed; for example (LT 3), the worthy are not exalted or rewarded, competition is not promoted, there is no unnecessary accumulation of possessions, consumerism and the manufacturing of wants is discouraged. In short, all the main approved features of modern economic behaviour – the sources of greed, discrimination and strife according to Taoism (Chan p.103) – are gently set aside; they do not represent natural, or satisfactory, ways.

Just as nature can operate by itself without a director or boss, so a confederation can run itself without an emperor or president. True, there may be one or more rulers. However a Taoist ruler/sage "exercises" non-dominating authority. But obviously, since he exercises no authority, some of the stuffing has been removed from notion of authority. The ruler/sage has no personal power. He imposes nothing on others. He transmits worthwhile tradition but does not impose it. He is said to transmit it through eternal edicts, but these are principles proffered or advice at best. He does not attempt to legislate or require the good. Society is like the individual, it cannot be coerced into doing right things. And it should not be! At work is a teleological model of "transcendent" good, a bit like a natural law theory, but even more like recent deep environmental theory. No more than co-operating individuals in a social matrix are required for the good. A ruler, or organiser, does not attempt to require it for society. He takes no action and the people are transformed by an exemplar ruler. He is a ruler on a rather more Gandhian model, but even so not a visible charismatic leader. Unlike contemporary models, the ruler is not a jet-setter or super-consumer; he is not usually seen on television, and perhaps not seen at all, but only known about, or his or her existence merely rumoured.

As with "authority", but even more so, other social and political terms thus get drastically turned around, and even subverted. The "empire" ceases to be coercive power, but turns into a natural super-regional order under general guidance of the Tao. "Possessing the empire" even comes to mean something like attunement to Te. The "power" of a ruler is not coercive. It is exemplary. The best rulers are those whose existence is merely known by the people. Thus they are not rulers or leaders, but models for personal development. (For Deep Ecology the corresponding roles would be those of eco-saints.) They are not apart from society, but central to society's ideals. Society could have a lot of "rulers" (kingly people) or could consist entirely of "kingly people". Like Christ, a taoist ruler "leads" from within or behind. The people seeing the life of the sage choose to do likewise.

ε An ideal ruler is a non-interfering exemplar ruler. The people become, if you like, ruler-groupies. The sage understands the fundamentals of Tao, and practices accordingly. So Taoism reinterprets the notion of "ruler", equating ruler with supreme exemplar, such as the sage. The meaning attributed to "ruler" becomes that of following Tao. The ruler is one who deviates little from the Tao. This is his "power". Someone who deviates little from the Tao is kingly, that is, to observe another subversion of terminology, he shows an all-embracing impartiality. The sage and the "ruler" are but two important examples of an ideal life. A more general model is also sketched (notably in LT 8) of the best type of person – a person 'who in his dwelling loves the earth', but also loves humanity, and order, and

competence, and profundity.

While Taoism is decidedly short on structural details for organising large human populations, which are no longer self-regulating (by contrast with large dense populations of modern penguins), it nonetheless transmits significant political messages, which deep theory needs to assimilate. Taoism has been attacked, like other similar alternative political forms (e.g. Morris's social anarchism and Illich's convivial society), as being conservative, as seeking anachronistically to turn the clock back to some ancient village communal life-style, better left far behind. Such attacks do not cohere. Such considerable changes, as Taoism envisages, from the status quo, can hardly be represented as conservative. To be sure, there are conservative elements in Taoism, as in the most radical environmental movements, for instance the desire to conserve elements of the natural environment that the "conservatives" wish to exploit or destroy. ('Conservative', like many a political terms in heavy popular use, breaks down under conceptual overload.)

While backward-looking glances at an idealised past is a conservative tendency, anathema to forward-looking progressives who prefer to leave the past obscured in a heavy cloud of dust, nonetheless, the past, with its actual features, its blocked possibilities, and its paths not taken, remains important to all main political persuasions. Against anarchistic positions, progressives like to lodge the charges *both* that the past never was ideal, that virtually everything that matters (not, surely, forests inhabited by wild creatures) was far worse than the enlightened present, *and* that anarchism has never really been achieved in the past. Again the charges do not cohere. (Proof is left as an exercise; but for hints, see EE).

It should be evident that Taoism was, and remains, a radical position. It represents a severe attack on mainstream civilization, on themes of the dominant social paradigm. It discards or upsets many mainstream values, and most mainstream ways of organising and doing things. It holds up instead examples of very different lifestyles as much preferable, and offers a very mean path, simple and modest, between insufficiency and excess.

APPENDIX. Doctrines of Four: the four great things and the fourfold way. Running in a striking way through the history of thought are certain related doctrines of four – of four great, important or valuable, things, whose basic interrelations are fundamental to the whole doctrine involved. Consider first three, plainly related, fourfolds, of much interest in deeper ecological thinking:-

<i>"Fourfold way" of Tao</i>	<i>Heidegger's Fourfold</i>	<i>A Deep Ecology Fourfold</i>
the Way/Tao	God(s)	Whole/Gaia