

Matthew Tanzer
Intro to Philosophy, Sect-005
Alexander Izrailevsky
7/23/12
Favorite Philosopher Paper

E-portfolio Link-

Lao Tzu (Wu-Wei)

Even after thousands of years, there is something undeniably relevant about the philosophy of Lao Tzu. His teachings and life show a timelessness of either his words or a consistency of the human spirit. Either way, the Philosophy of Lao Tzu deserves our attention. "He" may or may not have been an individual person, but more a collective memory of many philosophers that lived during the same time period. Regardless of this fact, "The Teacher's" or "Wise Man's" philosophy resonates with the natural side of the human spirit. The fact that Lao Tzu may not be a single person but rather a collective whole, lends to the validity and universality of the ideas to which people find a connection. The philosophy of Lao Tzu runs along a natural, non-contrived, and non-forced thread that results in a palatable and acceptable message.

The Philosopher believed in a simple and uncomplicated way of life. The importance of art over the sciences was an important aspect in his teachings. He spoke of the need to return to Nature and the flexibility to allow for nature to run its course. Lao Tzu was a believer of the idea of the Tao; a way of things that is omni-powerful and beyond our logical explanations. It is this force that runs the universe, balances nature, and governs the laws of existence. To be rigid to the Tao would most certainly crush a

person. Flexibility is a necessity in order to thrive in the world. It is this flexibility on which this paper will focus.

One of the ways for a person to be flexible to the way of the Tao is to be Patient and have a respect for the natural flow of time and nature. There is no need to force anything in this state of flexibility and patience. The only requirement is to be present, humble, and modest. This presence and lack of forced action can be called an art; the art of non-doing or Wu-Wei. It is not a way of doing nothing, being passive or removed from life. It is the art of effortlessly going along with the ebb and flow of nature. It is the total presence of spontaneity and allowing the moment to be fully lived and experienced. A complete lack of rigidity and preconception is what allows us to be prepared and accepting to the flow of change in our lives.

Life changes and turns directions without our input or say. Today, there are plenty of people living in America that feel like they must control every single thing that happens around their life. There are people who must take medications and drink alcohol to deal with the simple fact that the tide of their day has shifted from the expectation. We can be stubborn creatures that will relentlessly push our intentions against insurmountable odds and grind them against the grain of life. If we are too concentrated on our own actions, too focused on what we think we must make happen, we miss the cues and messages that the natural world is sending to us. In order to accomplish more in our lives, we will have more success in doing so by “going along with the flow.” This is not to say that we must be taken by life, and pushed around by it.

It is saying that we will experience more prosperity and happiness if we align our intentions with the forces of the world. There is little point of swimming against a current that is infinitely more powerful than ourselves.

It is important to find alignment with the Tao. But, it is impossible to be in sync with this natural current of the world if you are not aware of it. This is where the Art of non-action comes in. Instead of thinking of this art of non-action as a lack of action, it may be easier to think of it as the “Action of non-action”. If we do not attempt to place our rigid ideas and intentions aside, listen to, and feel the rhythms of our bodies and the natural world around us, we will remain inept to the Tao. The Tao will continue to exist as an unbending and governing force of the world, but we will be fighting it without even knowing it. We will not benefit ourselves or anyone else when our actions are not aligned with this force. If we take action to purposefully place ourselves in a position to be receptive to the hints and subtle cues of the world and then we allow it to move us, only then will we be aware enough to find this alignment.

Once, or if we are able to find this natural grain of life, we can exist with it. We do not need to force ourselves to follow it. There should be no forcing of anything. If we remain tuned to this ever changing and constantly transforming force of nature, we will be able to be present with it. If we are entirely in sync with this energy, our actions and intentions will be supported with it effortlessly. This effortlessness is the goal of Wu-Wei. When it becomes effortless to follow the movements and currents of the Tao we know we have found it. The goal is to be so aligned we become one with the Tao.

Understanding Wu-Wei is one thing, but understanding how it could effect and change our lives for the better could be much more important. If we think about our modern daily lives and how much we miss, it can be depressing. Our western/American culture is so oriented towards the individual identity, vanity, and self importance, that we miss the fact that we are forcing so much in our lives. We are told to go to school, become important and gain professional success. We are told to pursue happiness and find love. But, all of these things, and the way we think about them are so forced. We are so accustomed to hearing commands and orders when we talk about our life plans to the point that we are not even aware of it. We tell ourselves to *find* love, and to *pursue* happiness. A question may be asked; does the fulfillment of these orders really make us happy? Are we even noticing that we are fighting against a current?

It seems that we as a western culture have a problem with just letting something happen. Most of us think that the word "Organic" is a word used to describe a type of produce. We take pride in the diet of natural and organic foods, but we seem to stop there with this idea. If we could just give up on our personal missions and intentions, and listen to the world until we were able to feel or "hear" the rhythms, we may find what we need. We need to be present. We need to live so spontaneously that the only thing that exists for us is the moment we are currently in. Life experience is the moment which we are living. It is not our plan or our big idea, it is the experience of now, and nothing else.

When looking around in a modern crowd of people, or analyzing the internet and media culture, it is more rare to see only a few people staring into a lit screen than it is to see almost half. We are constantly trying to escape the moment, and to place our attention in other issues that don't concern the present around us. There is so much to be missed. There are experiences to be had, feelings to be felt, sights to see, and sounds to be heard all around us, but we're constantly ignoring them because our attention is not in the present. The focus is not on the now, it is in the past or on the future plans, While there is so much to be experienced right now.

Wu-Wei is not being lazy or shutting out the people around you. It is not the art of literally doing nothing, it is the art of non-doing. It is the art of experiencing life in the most present form. It is not the way of being in the moment, it is the way of going with the moment. To even attempt to apply this idea to our lives, we must let go of our hell-bent, and contrived life courses. Our American lives are rigid and planned. Our souls are so easily upset by a change in our personal plan. The idea of our important lives are like inflexible trees, while they are pretty and strong, they are not accepting of the flow of the wind through them. If the winds change too quickly or get too strong, our preconceptions and fabricated life paths will just break. But, if we remain flexible or even movable, there is little that the flow of life will do to us. We will be with the new winds, and accepting to the change; It will not break us, but move us. Wu-Wei is the art of being completely with the moment and living the human experience to the fullest.

Works Cited

Taoism - The Wu-Wei Principle. Kardash, Ted. Jade Dragon Online. Web. June 1998.

Accessed 7/15/12 <http://www.jadedragon.com/archives/june98/tao.html>

Lao Tzu Page. Lao Tzu's Philosophy. n.a. n.d. Web. Way of Perfect Emptiness, 2012.

Accessed 7/16/12 <http://www.taopage.org/laotzu/philosophy.html>

Class notes.