



## That All May Flourish: Comparative Religious Environmental Ethics

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## Daoism, Natural Life, and Human Flourishing

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### Abstract and Keywords

The chapter begins with a discussion of Daoist virtues that lead to human flourishing and the Daoist conception of how a life goes well, what it shows about, and implies for, people's relationship to the natural world of plants, animals, and environment. Humans are not distinct from these other life forms; rather, they are all "living beings" composed of *qi* (vital energy or life force). Qualities such as *ziran* (spontaneity or naturalness) lead to a relationship with animals characterized by care and nurture. According to the chapter, Daoists are more likely to be "responsible gardeners, farmers, and foresters" than "eco-warriors." Nevertheless, the environmental ethic inspired by this tradition shows promise for creating real change in the world.

**Keywords:** Daoism and ecology, environmental ethics, animals and ethics, gardening, *ziran*, David E. Cooper

In New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art there is a colored-ink handscroll by the 16th-century artist Qian Gu that depicts a famous gathering, held in 353 C.E., at the Orchid Pavilion in Shanyin. In the picture, a group of men sitting on the banks of a stream admire the natural surroundings, compose poems, drink wine, and talk. The painting beautifully communicates the perception of the Daoist calligrapher who organized this gathering that human lives, if they are to go well and flourish, should be led in intimate proximity to nature. This chapter is a sympathetic exploration of that Daoist perception.

*Eudaimonia*, Human Being, and Daoism

As a rendering of the ancient Greeks' notion of *eudaimonia*, "flourishing" has the advantage over "happiness" of drawing attention to the connection between *eudaimonia* and a conception of human life. If, as Aristotle held, *eudaimonia* is "living well and doing well" as a human being, it presupposes an understanding of the distinctive nature or "function" of human existence. For Aristotle, our distinctive "function" is "activity of the soul in accordance with reason": hence the flourishing life is the virtuous life, since, according to him, "virtue" refers to rational activities that are well conducted.<sup>1</sup>

The notion of human flourishing is easily extended to the many philosophical traditions, Eastern and Western, that concur with the Aristotelian thought that a human life flourishes—and is realized or fulfilled—through the exercise of virtues. Among these traditions, unsurprisingly, there are different views of the distinctive nature of **(p.78)** human life and hence of what it is for this kind of life to flourish. In this chapter, my subject is the Daoist conception of how a life goes well and what this shows about, and implies for, people's relationship to the natural world of plants, animals, and environments.

The label Daoism comes from the term *daojia* (House, or School, of the Way) that, around 100 B.C.E., Han dynasty historians gave to a philosophical tendency discernible in a number of writings composed or assembled two or three centuries earlier. These writings include the *Daodejing* ("The Classic of the Way and Virtue"), attributed to the legendary Laozi (The Old Master), *The Book of Zhuangzi* (Master Zhuang), and the *Neiye* ("Inner Training").<sup>2</sup> A related term, *daojiao* ("Teachings of the Way"), was later applied to the beliefs and practices of a number of organized religious or "liturgical" schools that began to emerge at the end of the 2nd century C.E. Despite periods during which it was suppressed, Daoism has remained—alongside Buddhism and Confucianism—a main spiritual tradition in China.

The Greek conception of human beings as "rational animals" is not one that is found in the Daoist texts and schools. As in other Chinese traditions of thought, human beings are seen as essentially embodied creatures, but they are not categorized alongside animals in contrast to plants and other forms of inanimate life: rather, they belong with all of these as "living beings" composed of *qi* (vital energy or life force). Chinese texts are as likely to compare a human being with a plant as with an animal in order, for example, to explain how men and women grow and develop.<sup>3</sup> Human beings are distinguished from other living beings through a number of related capacities. The most crucial are the abilities to recognize, follow, and identify with the *dao* (Way) (D 23)—the mysterious, ineffable source or wellspring that is "the beginning of Heaven and Earth" (D 1) and holds sway over all things. This ability consciously to identify with the *dao* is, the texts emphasize, one that presupposes a capacity for cultivation **(p.79)** and, where necessary, transformation of the self. Self-cultivation enables a person,

moreover, to discharge the uniquely human responsibility to help keep the world in good order—to “bring the world into harmony” (Z 33), or, in the words of a Han dynasty work, “to assist Heaven and Earth.”<sup>4</sup>

In keeping with this conception of human being, the flourishing life, for Daoism, is a virtuous one in which, through bodily, mental, and spiritual cultivation, a person comes to identify with what he or she recognizes as the mysterious source and sustainer of the cosmos. This is a sketch of the flourishing life that probably all Daoists could accept, but it is a brief and vague one that masks considerable differences among tendencies in various schools of Daoism. This limitation becomes clear as soon as one delves further into the matter of what it is for a life to harmonize with the *dao*. In such organized religious movements as the Ways of Great Clarity and of Complete Perfection, there is a pronounced emphasis on the attainment of immortality, apparently on the ground that by never exhausting one’s *qi*, a person thereby emulates the (eternal) *dao* itself. There is no similar emphasis, despite some remarks in the *Daodejing* on frugality and ensuring “long life” (D 59), in the older, classic texts. Again, in later Daoist religious dispensations, like that of the Way of the Celestial Masters, worship of Laozi—who is credited with the ability to intercede with Heaven—is a significant component in the spiritual life. There is no hint of the need for or appropriateness of religious worship of a sage in the *Daodejing* or the *Zhuangzi*.

My focus is on earlier or “philosophical” texts such as these two, and I do not discuss later religious doctrines and practices that are unlikely to have resonance for contemporary Western readers and that, in my judgment, have little basis in the foundational texts of Daoism. I do, though, occasionally cite later texts and briefly mention some extensions of ideas about human flourishing and the natural environment that were first indicated in the classic texts.

### Virtue and Nature

For the time being, I set aside the heady question of how and why a person’s life may be said to be in harmony with the *dao*, and instead consider the seemingly more tractable question of its harmony with nature. The two questions are closely related, since all things in the natural world, with the exception of errant human **(p.80)** beings, act in accordance with *dao*-given “patterns” that govern “the course of their being.”<sup>5</sup>

There are several reasons to think that in the flourishing life of the Daoist sage or “consummate person” an appropriate relationship to natural life—animals, plants, outdoor environments—is especially important. First, a human life is an embodied one whose connection with natural, physical environments is not irrelevant or merely incidental to spiritual fulfillment. Hence, one finds in Daoist tradition reflective attention to and management of the body’s integration with nature. A well-known example is the practice of *fengshui* (wind-water) in architecture and landscape design. Second, an abiding theme in Chinese culture

since ancient times has been that of natural environments as places where human beings may exercise freedom and find the tranquility essential to appreciative understanding of the *dao*. “Too long a prisoner, captive in a cage, / Now I can get back to Nature.” These words from the 4th–5th century Daoist Tao Qian’s poem “Returning to Live in the Country” were to be echoed by countless poets of the Tang era, including Li Bai and Wang Wei. Third, an important aspect of the responsibility that human beings have for maintaining good order and harmony in the cosmos is, as already noted, supporting “the myriad creatures in their natural condition” (D 64) and “nourishing” them (Z 33).

But in what, exactly, might harmony with the natural world consist? In popular Western writings on Daoism, at least three suggestions have been made. To begin with, we find the “primitivist” idea that harmony requires a “back to nature” style of life—one that seeks to retrieve some very ancient condition of humankind that supposedly existed prior to the emergence of technology, art, and even society. This idea, and its label, are indeed suggested by some remarks in the “primitivist” chapters of the *Zhuangzi*. Here we find calls to go back to our “uncontrived condition” and reference to carpenters as committing a “crime” in their “mutilation” of wood (Z 9). However, the considered Daoist position is not a “primitivist” one, and almost certainly the remarks that encourage this construal were not mouthed by Master Zhuang himself: the book attributed to him, like most ancient Daoist texts, were compilations, not single-authored works. The classic texts call, not for a return to “the state of nature,” but for the conservation of simple agricultural societies in which people are literate, live in houses, dress well, and so on (D 80). Moreover, as we saw earlier, the life of virtue demands reflective understanding (though not necessarily of a kind that can be explicitly articulated): the virtuous Daoist is not a “noble savage.” As one commentator (p.81) puts it, virtuous Daoists become “*aware* that they are moved by the Way,” an experience that is incompatible with “regression to an animal-like unity with nature.”<sup>6</sup>

A second and related suggestion is that to seek harmony between human beings and nature is essentially to embrace and practice a “wilderness ideal,” a maximally noninterventionist “letting be” of nature for the sake of “saving the earth.” But there is no such wilderness ideal in Daoism. *Fengshui* and garden design, to take two obvious examples, are practices that Daoists have traditionally admired and engaged in, but ones that of course involve “intervention” in nature. Generally, too, the landscapes praised by the poets as places in which to find freedom and peace are not wild and remote ones, but “human landscapes,” such as orchards and rivers on which people boat. Typically, the poets write not of wilderness, but of the countryside. It is true that there are texts—notably, the *One Hundred and Eighty Precepts*, followed by the early Celestial Masters—that forbid, among much else, disturbing birds and animals, poisoning lakes, and burning vegetation. But the purpose of such precepts is less to conserve pristine wilderness than to ensure that natural

environments, cultivated or not, are suitable spaces—sacred ones, in effect—in which priests and other adepts may conduct their spiritual tasks.<sup>7</sup> Anyway, it would surely be a strange kind of harmony with nature that required human beings simply to leave nature alone. Such a policy is contradicted by the Daoist recognition of the intimate interconnections between the human and the nonhuman—by, for example, the emphasis in the *Neiye* (N 1) on how the *qi* that flows through everything unites heaven, earth, and human beings together. Hyperbolic expression is given to this interconnectedness when Zhuangzi proclaims that “Heaven and earth were born with me, and the myriad things and I are one” (Z 2).

Finally, there is the familiar suggestion that Daoist harmony with nature is, to borrow from current vernacular, to “go with the flow,” be “laid back” or perhaps remain permanently “chilled out.” The suggestion is encouraged, no doubt, by pictorial and literary images of Daoist sages as gently smiling, easy-going, sandal-wearing wanderers and, more seriously, by the analogy stressed in the *Daodejing* (e.g., D 8) between the sage and water. We should, the book urges, emulate water in its flexibility, the nonconfrontational way it goes around obstacles, its natural, steady flow, and so on. This analogy, together with remarks on the ideal of *wu wei* (lit. non-action), inspire a rhetoric of the sage as someone who works with, not against, nature. But it is difficult to know quite what this rhetoric enjoins by way **(p.82)** of actual relations with the natural world. It might seem obvious, for instance, that the Daoist gardener is one who will respect the innate natures of plants. Yet, later Daoists certainly regarded the ideal of *wu wei* as compatible with alchemy and other interventionist techniques. One commentator goes as far as to observe that the traditional Daoist “quest for transformation is alive and well in university laboratories” where work is done on genetic engineering and artificial intelligence.<sup>8</sup> This is hardly the kind of work suggested by phrases like “going with the flow” of nature, but the fact is that, without further elaboration and specification, this rhetoric, suggestive as it is, presupposes—rather than helps to explain—the notion of harmony with nature that it claims to articulate.

Various suggestions, then, as to the form taken by harmony with nature—an important dimension, we know, of the flourishing life for Daoists—have proved unilluminating. For some help, let us consider the sage figures that populate the classic Daoist texts, for these are held to exemplify harmony with nature.

### Sages and Spontaneity

*The Book of Zhuangzi* in particular is crowded with characters who are regarded as manifesting or embodying *de*. This Chinese term is usually translated as “virtue,” but in some contexts it is better rendered by such words as “power” or “efficacy.” The *de* of a thing or creature is what enables it to become a good example of the kind of being it is. *De* should be “honored,” according to the *Daodejing* (D 51), since it is what “nurtures,” “rears” and “confirms” things. *De*

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in the case of human beings is virtue in the sense of the set of qualities or dispositions that enable people to live flourishing and authentically human lives.

Our word “virtue” has acquired a moralistic ring, but by no means are all of the qualities of *de* qualities that we would readily describe as moral virtues. Indeed, the classic texts are often suspicious of, or downright hostile to, morality when this is understood in terms of acting according to principles or out of a sense of duty. It is only when “the Way was lost,” the *Daodejing* more than once reminds us, that people become preoccupied with “righteousness,” “benevolence,” moral conventions, and rites (D 38). In the *Zhuangzi*, this preoccupation—alongside ones with scholarship and technology—is regarded as a mark of a “contrived” and “entangled” way of living that harms the “inborn nature” we should instead be cultivating (Z 8).

In this suspicion of morality, scholarship, and clever technology there is an important clue to the Daoist conception of the *de* of human beings. It indicates **(p.83)** the central place in this conception of *ziran*—a term that literally means something like “self-so-ness,” but is usually rendered by “spontaneity” or “naturalness.” This is not, however, the kind of spontaneity prescribed by Romantics, Existentialists, or hippies—“a surrender to passions,” the performance of *actes gratuits*, or just “doing your own thing.” Rather, as one commentator writes, it is “responsiveness in the impersonal calm when vision is most lucid.”<sup>9</sup> The sage “uses [the] mind like a mirror” (Z 7), reflecting how things themselves are instead of viewing them through the distorting prisms of prejudice and self-interest. The sage then “follows along with the way each thing is of itself . . . without trying to add anything” (Z 5). Principles and norms of behavior then become redundant, for they are devices that are employed only by people whose vision is clouded or whose responsiveness to things is atrophied.

The various virtues of the sage are all connected with the ideal of *ziran*—whether as aspects, conditions, or consequences of it. One important virtue that is clearly an aspect of spontaneity is freedom—not in the sense of a license to act as one pleases, but in that of freedom from the contrivances, entanglements, prejudices, and fixed ideas that occlude attentive, mindful responsiveness to things. Something from which it is especially important to become free is what Zhuangzi calls the “characteristic inclination”—characteristic, at least, in complex and sophisticated societies—to *judge* things, to affirm this as right, that as wrong (Z 5). To view things in a manner distorted by the practical and other values that they have for *us* is to be blind to how the things themselves really are. It is this distorting vision that, more than anything else, confirms people’s loss of the Way, their distance from the simpler and wiser ways of their ancestors. The obsession with rules, the relentless pursuit of “clever” technology, and the perpetual restlessness of urban life betray a failure any longer to perceive and respond to things as they really are.

Several Daoist virtues are, in effect, conditions for the exercise of spontaneity. Consider, for example, care and discipline of the body. Unless their “eyes and ears are acute and clear,” and their bodies “supple,” people will be unable to “mirror things” and to perceive and respond to them “with great clarity” (N 16). The same text talks of the “tranquility” necessary for clarity of perception and response, a theme that is also prominent in the *Daodejing*. The sage’s mind must be “still” for, when “stirred-up,” it becomes “muddled”—hence the sage “desires to be without [the] desires” that produce frustration, anxiety, and mental turbulence” (D 15, 64). A further condition for spontaneity is the virtue of humility. This is a virtue that anyway becomes necessary when we realize, as Zhuangzi continually urges (p.84) us to do, that we cannot really *know* many of things we claim to do: “nothing can be definitively called greater or lesser” (Z 17). More to the present point, overconfidence in beliefs and values, and a hubristic refusal to be open to new perspectives, are obviously obstacles to exercising the attentive flexibility that is a mark of spontaneity.

Then there are the virtues that we would expect to be practiced by the spontaneous person. For example, compassion or lovingkindness—one of Laozi’s “three treasures” (D67)—will be the natural attitude adopted toward vulnerable people or other creatures once they are seen for what they are and not in a way distorted by personal preferences or hierarchical judgments about a creature’s worth (Z 5, 17). We would expect, as well, that a spontaneous person’s comportment in the world would be that of *wu wei*, defined by an early commentator on the *Daodejing* as “following what is spontaneous.”<sup>10</sup> The many craftsmen and skilled practitioners in the *Zhuangzi* whom we are invited to admire—butchers, swimmers, carpenters, and so on—are people who do not impose themselves on, or contend with, their materials or environment. The consummate swimmer, for example, explains that he “follows the course of the water itself without making any private one of my own” (Z 19). Through mindful attention and flexible responses to things, such persons succeed in their aims economically, gracefully, and without friction.

But why, exactly, is *ziran* or spontaneity an ideal? For Daoists, recall, a human life is a flourishing one when it is led in conscious appreciation of its harmony with nature and hence the *dao*. The answer to the question must therefore be that the *dao* itself is *ziran*, “self-so”: there is then a likeness between the virtuous person and the *dao*. This is an answer made explicit in the *Daodejing* (D 25), in which it is explained that people ultimately model themselves on the *dao*, which in turn “models itself on what is spontaneous.” The *dao*, although it defies literal description, can be described in such figurative terms as “noncontending,” “gentle,” “self-reliant,” “tranquil,” “nurturing,” “unbiased,” “humble”—terms that help to register that the *dao* has nothing outside of itself to be controlled by or to impose itself on, and that in its unfolding it brings balance and nourishment to all things. In all of this philosophy, there is an analogy with the virtuous sage and skilled practitioner. The sage, swimmer, or carpenter, for

example, who “follows the way each thing is . . . without bias” thereby helps to guarantee that “the world will be in order” (Z 7). The swimmer, through acting in keeping with his **(p.85)** appreciation of how to swim in harmony with the way of things, thereby makes his own small contribution to the harmony of the cosmos.

These answers to the questions of why certain qualities count for Daoists as virtues, and why a spontaneous way of being present in the world is an ideal, leave it fairly open, however, how in everyday practice people should conduct themselves in relation to the natural world. Perhaps this issue can be clarified by first considering what the texts have to say about our treatment of and attitudes toward animals.

#### “Living with the Birds and Beasts”

In the early 21st century, several statements have been made by Daoist organizations enjoining ethical treatment of animals: for example, by condemning the use in traditional medicine of animal extracts as aphrodisiacs. But these statements are often colored by a modern Western rhetoric of the rights and intrinsic value of animals that has no parallel in traditional Daoist texts. The attitude in these texts, moreover, is clearly a “speciesist” one, in the sense of attributing a special status to human beings, as creatures with a *dao*-given responsibility “to bring the world into harmony.” With the significant exception of certain early texts, like *The One Hundred and Eighty Precepts* referred to above, there is relatively little material on animals in the literature of the organized religious schools. Especially among the remarks attributed to Zhuangzi and an earlier sage, Liezi, however, there emerges a clear and attractive account—condensed in the remark that “in the days of perfect virtue, the people lived together with the birds and beasts” (Z 9)—of how the virtuous person will relate to animals.

To begin with, we should admire and learn from many animals as models of the effortless spontaneity that human beings find it so hard to cultivate. Watching fish darting through a pond, for example, can be an object lesson in liberation from obsession with particular goals, in frictionless social relations, and in “allowing the flow of [our] lives to settle into stability” (Z 6). It is worth noting, in this connection, that many Daoist physical exercises and disciplines are inspired by the movements of animals, including cranes and monkeys.<sup>11</sup>

This natural admiration for animals is one reason that hunters, trappers, and fishermen should eschew technologically sophisticated trickery and contrivance when killing or catching animals. More importantly, the effect of such interventions in the natural world is to throw creatures into “great disorder” and **(p.86)** change their “inborn natures” (Z 13)—perhaps by turning them into purely nocturnal creatures, terrified to come out by day, or by upsetting a delicate ecological balance. Whether or not there is truth to the claim, alluded to

earlier, that genetic engineering of animals is a modern extension of the traditional alchemical techniques of some religious Daoist schools, it is hard to conceive of Zhuangzi endorsing such a practice.

That people are able to inflict on animals ingenious and cruel methods of hunting is just one symptom of the estrangement from animals of people who no longer “live together with the birds and beasts,” people for whom there is no longer any sense of communion with animals. We should try to redress this estrangement, urges Liezi, partly by recalling how similar to those of human beings are the desires, intelligence, and wish to preserve their lives that animals have. But we should try as well to restore close relations with animals by, for example, inviting them to “roam in [the] garden and sleep in [the] yard,” so that the animals will eventually regard their host as “one of themselves” (L 2). People should, more generally, “walk side-by-side” with animals, for our own lives go better when we exercise virtues like compassion toward animals. As the 4th-century C.E. work, *Baopuzi* (the Master Who Embraces Simplicity), puts it, when railing against those who “enslave the myriad things,” by treating animals benevolently and even with love “one becomes a person of high virtue and will be blessed by Heaven.”<sup>12</sup>

The enslavement of animals that results from exploiting them for profit and from the atrophy of communion with them both reflects and reinforces a failure to see animals for what they are, a failure to exercise the mindful attention to things and creatures that is a precondition of spontaneity. The *Zhuangzi*, in particular, is full of examples whereby people ignore a creature’s own nature—whether through stupidity or indifference—and accordingly treat it in an inappropriate way. In one story, a well-intentioned, but ignorant, man feeds a captured bird, not with “the wiggly things” it needs and likes, but with “the finest meats” and other gastronomic delicacies, thereby ensuring that the creature wastes away (Z 19). In another passage, horse trainers, determined to make the animals obedient, brand, bridle, and fetter them, in violation of the “inborn nature of horses,” which is freely to “prance and jump over the terrain” (Z 9). The trainers exemplify the entrenched tendency to view animals as put on earth in order to serve human interests. In the *Liezi*, a courageous boy takes to task a visiting dignitary who has thanked Heaven for providing—“for the sake of man”—the animals he is about to feast upon. Mosquitoes, the boy reasons, might as well thank Heaven for providing human blood to drink (L 8). Liezi would have welcomed early 21st (p.87) century pronouncements of the China Daoist Association, such as its “Daoist Faith Statement,” that criticize traditional Chinese medicinal practices in which rhinos, bears, and other animals are regarded as resources from which to extract ingredients that supposedly benefit human health or sexual potency.<sup>13</sup>

The emphasis on attention to and recognition of the natures of animals helps one to understand the many references in the classic texts to the virtuous person's "nurturing," "rearing," and "supporting" of things and creatures. As the *Daodejing* expresses it, what is "supported" by the sage whose desires are controlled and who does not impose on the world is "the own course (*ziran*)" of creatures and things (D 64). A world where animals are turned into materials for our use is one that is out of balance and discordant, for it is one in which the *dao*-given natures of natural beings are violated.

Compassionate, respectful, mindful, affectionate—these qualities of a person's attitude toward animals are paradigmatic of the exercise of virtue. As such, it is worth exploring how this relationship to animals may be indicative of the larger consonance with nature and the *dao* itself that, we know, is essential to human flourishing.

#### Nature, *Dao*, and Human Flourishing

Like a "Daoist animal ethics," a "Daoist environmental ethics" makes no appeal to notions like rights and intrinsic value. This omission does not mean, however, that it is a "shallow" or "anthropocentric" ethics that focuses solely on how human beings may materially benefit from a harmonious relationship to nature. (This focus is despite the several references in both ancient and contemporary texts to the "prosperity and longevity" we may hope to enjoy if we live in an appropriate relation to natural environments.) If the Daoist position has to be slotted into the categories of modern moral philosophy, it is best regarded as a form of "virtue ethics." Our attitudes and actions toward the natural world should be grounded in a conception of what makes a human life a virtuous or flourishing one.

A good way to understand what an ethical comportment toward nature might be like is to unpack the metaphor, inspired by references to human beings "nurturing" the myriad things, of Daoists as "gardeners of the cosmos."<sup>14</sup> It is a metaphor that helps to draw attention to several important aspects of this (p. 88) comportment. For a start, it suggests—as we might expect on the basis of earlier remarks—that the environmental concern of Daoists is not solely or mainly with wilderness: for example, with protecting wild places from all human activity. Environmental concern, as we saw in the case of the *One Hundred and Eighty Precepts*, is more focused on places where human beings engage with nature.

The metaphor indicates next a number of analogies between the responsible gardener and people who conduct themselves appropriately in and toward natural environments. The good gardener nurtures and cares for plants and is attentive and responsive to the needs of what he or she is growing, and avoids forcing and rushing things. Like the farmer described by Zhuangzi (Z 12) who eschews a fancy newfangled irrigation device, the good gardener resists

becoming entangled in technological “trickery” and “contrivance” and thereby losing contact with “the pure and simple and vital.” Likewise, the attitude and comportment of people toward the natural environments that lie beyond the walls of their gardens should be caring, attentive, responsive, and free from the desire to submit them to technological control and exploitation. The virtuous Daoist extends to the landscape the kind of care shown by gardeners for their garden—and, indeed, the kind of concern for animals that Liezi and Zhuangzi proposed.

While gardening need not be solitary, it is typically “personal,” for gardeners usually own the gardens in which they work and where they have their homes. To cultivate a garden is therefore to be fostering, at the same time, an individual, personal relationship with the garden. The Daoist emphasis on how we should relate to nature is a similarly “personal” one. In the books of Liezi and Zhuangzi, as in later works that perceive natural environments as theaters in which to seek health, peace of mind, and longevity, concern for nature is directed, in the first instance, toward the cultivation of one’s own relationship to it. The Daoist is less likely to be found in the ranks of “eco-warriors,” fighting against some global injustice, than among those—like responsible gardeners, farmers, and foresters—who care for the local places and creatures with which they are intimate and their lives are entwined. A text whose importance has been recognized only in recent times, the *Taiping jing* (Scripture of Great Peace), puts into the mouth of a sage-king a simple expression of what is itself a simple but moving message: “people should assist Heaven to produce living things and assist Earth by giving nourishment to form proper shapes.”<sup>15</sup>

**(p.89)** Little needs to be added to this description of the virtuous Daoist’s relations with animals and nature in order to understand how the life of this person is a flourishing one—a life, that is, “on the Way,” in harmony with the *dao*. This harmony is because to be “on the Way” just is intelligently and reflectively to cultivate and exercise the virtues that inform right relations not only with one’s fellow human beings, but also with natural environments and creatures. To be in harmony with the *dao* is not to stand in a certain privileged relation to a personal creator God, or—at the other extreme—is it to abandon one’s humanity and seek to become, as Hegel put it, “sunk in nature.” It is, rather, to live spontaneously, thereby aligning one’s life to the nature of the *dao*, which is “modeled” on *ziran*. Exercising the virtues—spontaneity itself, and the qualities that flow into and from it—not least in relation to natural life, is the way that men and women are “on the Way” and lead lives that are flourishing.

#### Notes:

(1.) *Nicomachean Ethics* 1102, 1095ff.

(2.) References to the classic works within the text use the abbreviations indicated for the following works: *Daodejing* (D), *The Book of Zhuangzi* (Z), *The Book of Liezi* (L), *Neiye* (N). References are to chapters of these works (e.g., D 25 refers to Chapter 25 of the *Daodejing*). I have drawn on various translations, but especially P.J. Ivanhoe, *The Daodejing of Laozi* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002); B. Ziporyn, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings, with Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2009); A.C. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-Tzu: A Classic of Tao* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); H. Roth, *The Nei-yeh*, [www.stillness.com/tao/nei-yeh.txt](http://www.stillness.com/tao/nei-yeh.txt) (1999).

(3.) See Sarah Allan, *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 94ff. One important figure whom Allan discusses is the Confucian thinker Mencius, whose moral philosophy is informed by an analogy between humans and plants.

(4.) Zhang Jiju, "A Declaration of the Chinese Daoist Association on Global Ecology," in *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within a Cosmic Landscape*, N.J. Girardot, James Miller, and Liu Xiaogan, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 367.

(5.) Han Feizi, "Returning to Live in the Country," in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, Wing-Tsit Chan, ed. and trans. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), 260.

(6.) Eske Møllgaard, *An Introduction to Daoist Thought: Action, Language and Ethics in Zhuangzi* (London: Routledge, 2007), 124.

(7.) See Kristofer Schipper, "Daoist Ecology: The Inner Transformation; A Study of the Precepts of the Early Daoist Ecclesia," in *Daoism and Ecology*.

(8.) James Miller, *Daoism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 121.

(9.) A.C. Graham, *Chuang-Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2001), 14.

(10.) Wang Bi, cited in David E. Cooper, *Convergence with Nature: A Daoist Perspective* (Dartington, UK: Green Books, 2012), 36.

(11.) Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 137–138.

(12.) Jiju, "A Declaration," in *Daoism and Ecology*, 366–367.

(13.) "Daoist Faith Statement," included in Martin Palmer (with Victoria Finlay), *Faith in Conservation* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2003). For a more extended

version of my account of Daoist attitudes toward animals, see David E. Cooper, "Birds, Beasts and the *Dao*," *Philosopher's Magazine* 65 (2014): 84–90.

(14.) The phrase is James Miller's, in *Daoism: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), pp. 45–46, but it is one with precedents in Daoist literature. For a detailed exposition of the metaphor, see David E. Cooper, "Gardeners of the Cosmos: The Way of the Garden in East Asian Tradition," in *The Good Gardener: Nature, Humanity and the Garden*, Annette Giesecke and Naomi Jacobs, eds. (London: Artifice, 2015).

(15.) Jiju, "A Declaration," in *Daoism and Ecology*, 367.