

10.5 *The Te of Piglet*

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Preparing to Read

Taoism, a philosophy that originated in ancient China, affirms the interconnectedness of everything in an even more radical way. Like nature, it says, we are composed of various elements and everything is an expression of the Tao. As the center of the circle, the Tao is complete and cannot be spoken of. To speak of it is to particularize the Tao, to bring it into the world of the ten thousand things.

Before what Hoff calls the "Great Separation" of humans from the rest of nature, everything was naturally in harmony with the Tao or Way of the Universe. Just as the sun knows how to shine and when to relinquish its role in the heavens to the coolness of moonlight, humans once understood the principles of Taoism—Natural Simplicity, Effortless Action, Spontaneity, and Compassion.

Confucianism, with its principles of Righteousness, Propriety, Benevolence, Loyalty, Good Faith, Duty, and Justice, reflects post-Separation ethics. For Taoists ethics or virtue lies in discarding whatever prevents harmony with Tao. The Chinese word *te* appears in two forms: combining the characters for "upright" and "heart," it can be translated as "virtue"; adding the character for "left foot," which means "stepping out," yields its second meaning, "virtue in action."

In the Winnie-the-Pooh stories, it is Pooh bear who understands the effortless simplicity of the Tao, but it is Piglet who undergoes the transformation from virtue to virtue that steps out. Hence, the book's title—*The Te of Piglet*.

THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO, man lived in harmony with the rest of the natural world. Through what we would today call Telepathy, he communicated with animals, plants, and other forms of life—none of which he considered "beneath" himself, only different, with different jobs to perform. He worked side by side with earth angels and nature spirits, with whom he shared responsibility for taking care of the world.

The earth's atmosphere was very different from what it is now, with a great deal more vegetation-supporting moisture. A tremendous variety of vegetable, fruit, seed, and grain food was available. Because of such a diet, and a lack of unnatural strain, human life span was many times longer than what it is today. The killing of animals for food or "sport" was unthinkable. Man lived at peace with himself and the various life forms, whom he considered his teachers and friends.

But gradually at first, and then with increasing intensity, man's Ego began to grow and assert itself. Finally, after it had caused many unpleasant incidents, the consensus was reached that man should go out into the world alone, to learn a necessary lesson. The connections were broken.

On his own, feeling alienated from the world he had been created from, cut off from the full extent of its abundance, man was no longer happy. He began to search for the happiness he had lost. When he found something that reminded him of it, he tried to possess it and accumulate more—thereby introducing Stress into his life. But searching for lasting happiness and accumulating temporary substitutes for it brought him no satisfaction.

As he was no longer able to hear what the other forms of life were saying, he could only try to understand them through their actions, which he often misinterpreted. Because he was no longer cooperating with the earth angels and nature spirits for the good of all, but was attempting to manipulate the earth forces for his benefit alone, plants began to shrivel and die. With less vegetation to draw up and give off moisture, the planet's atmosphere became drier, and deserts appeared. A relatively small number of plant species survived, which grew smaller and tougher with passing time. Eventually they lost the radiant colors and abundant fruit of their ancestors. Man's life span began to shorten accordingly, and diseases appeared and spread. Because of the decreasing variety of food

Principle of Tao

2 = Virtue in action

Cooperating vs manipulate

available to him—and his growing insensitivity—man began to kill and eat his friends the animals. They soon learned to flee from his approach and became increasingly shy and suspicious of human motives and behavior. And so the separation grew. After several generations, few people had any idea of what life had once been like.

As man became more and more manipulative of and violent toward the earth, and as his social and spiritual world narrowed to that of the human race alone, he became more and more manipulative of and violent toward his own kind. Men began to kill and enslave each other, creating armies and empires, forcing those who looked, talked, thought, and acted differently from them to submit to what they thought was best.

Life became so miserable for the human race that, around two to three thousand years ago, perfected spirits began to be born on earth in human form, to teach the truths that had largely been forgotten. But by then humanity had grown so divided, and so insensitive to the universal laws operating in the natural world, that those truths were only partially understood.

As time passed, the teachings of the perfected spirits were changed, for what one might call political reasons, by the all-too-human organizations that inherited them. Those who came into prominence within the organizations wanted power over others. They downplayed the importance of nonhuman life forms and eliminated from the teachings statements claiming that those forms had souls, wisdom, and divine presence—and that the heaven they were in touch with was a state of Unity with the Divine that could be attained by anyone who put aside his ego and followed the universal laws. The power-hungry wanted their followers to believe that heaven was a place to which some people—and only people—went after death, a place that could be reached by those who had the approval of *their* organizations. So not even the perfected spirits were able to restore the wholeness of truth, because of interference by the human ego.

Down through the centuries, accounts of the Great Separation, and of the Golden Age that ex-

isted before it, have been passed on by the sensitive and wise. Today in the industrial West, they are classified as mere legends and myths—fantasies believed in by the credulous and unsophisticated, stories based only on imagination and emotion. Despite the fact that quite a few people have seen and communicated with earth angels and nature spirits, and that more than one spiritual community has grown luscious fruits and vegetables by cooperating with them and following their instructions, descriptions of these beings are generally dismissed as “fairy tales.” And, although colored and simplified accounts of the Great Separation can be found in the holy books of the world's religions, it is doubtful that many followers of those religions strongly believe in them.

However, a number of pre-Separation skills, beliefs, and practices have been preserved. On the North American continent, they are passed on in some of what remains of native teachings—those of the “Indians.” In Europe they have largely died out, but traces of their influence can still be seen in such comparatively recent phenomena as stone circles and the marking of “ley lines” (called “dragon veins” by the Chinese)—channels along which earth energy is concentrated. In Tibet, until the Communist invasion, ancient ways were preserved in Tibetan Buddhism, many of the secrets and practices of which predate Buddhism by thousands of years. In Japan, they can be found in some of the rituals and beliefs of the Shinto (“spirit way”) folk religion. In China, they have been passed on through Taoism. And, despite violent opposition from China's Communist government, they continue to be passed on today.

Briefly, Taoism is a way of living in harmony with Tao, the Way of the Universe, the character of which is revealed in the workings of the natural world. Taoism could be called either a philosophy or a religion, or neither, since in its various forms it does not match up with Western ideas or definitions of either one.

In China, Taoism is what might be called the counterbalance of Confucianism, the codified, ritualized teachings of K'ung Fu-tse, or “Master

Organized Religion

K'ung," better known in the West as Confucius. Although Confucianism is not a religion in the Western sense, it could be said to bear a certain resemblance to puritanical Christianity in its man-centered, nature-ignoring outlook, its emphasis on rigid conformity, and its authoritarian, No-Nonsense attitude toward life. Confucianism concerns itself mostly with human relations—with social and political rules and hierarchies. Its major contributions have been in the areas of government, business, clan and family relations, and ancestor reverence. Its most vital principles are Righteousness, Propriety, Benevolence, Loyalty, Good Faith, Duty, and Justice. Briefly stated, Confucianism deals with the individual's place within the group.

In contrast, Taoism deals primarily with the individual's relationship to the world. Taoism's contributions have been mostly scientific, artistic, and spiritual. From Taoism came Chinese science, medicine, gardening, landscape painting, and nature poetry. Its key principles are Natural Simplicity, Effortless Action, Spontaneity, and

Compassion. The most easily noticed difference between Confucianism and Taoism is emotional, a difference in *feeling*: Confucianism is stern, regimented, patriarchal, often severe; Taoism is happy, gentle, childlike, and serene—like its favorite symbol, that of flowing water.

Taoism is classically viewed as the teachings of three men: Lao-tse ("Master Lao"), author of the major Taoist classic, the *Tao Te Ching*, which is said to have been written around twenty-five hundred years ago; Chuang-tse ("Master Chuang"), author of several works and founder of a school of writers and philosophers during the Warring States period, approximately two thousand years ago; and the semilegendary Yellow Emperor, who ruled over forty-five hundred years ago, and to whom are attributed various meditative, alchemical, and medicinal principles and practices. These three were the great organizers and communicators of Taoist thought, rather than its founders; for, as we have said, what is now known as Taoism began before any of them were born, in what Chuang-tse called the Age of Perfect Virtue. . . .

Continuing to Think

Although the concepts are Chinese, the ethical theory expressed in this selection may have a familiar ring for you. Currently, it goes by the name of bioethics, and it asks us to broaden the scope of our ethical understanding to include all the biosphere—other animals, plants, rivers—the environment itself.

If, in spite of the Great Separation, we are really interrelated with everything else, we must take all of it into account. Akan ethics and mestiza consciousness broaden the scope of our moral web to include all humans; here we embrace all of life. If it is unethical to kill and eat a fellow human, why is it okay to raise other animals under brutal conditions for their meat and fur? Can we pollute our streams without behaving unethically?

What we would have to give up is our exclusive claim to a unique status based on our human nature. What we stand to gain is a life of harmony and spontaneity. The first phase of **biocentric ethics** focused on the rights of companion animals. The second stage considers all of life and is sometimes described as environmental ethics. It is much more complicated to include all of life in your moral web, and it may be more satisfying to do so.

Hoff asks us to question how happy we really are with our Confucian attention to "social rules and hierarchies." In his view, it is time to bridge the gap created by the

Great Separation and return to a gentle serenity—to be more like flowing water, which happily goes around anything in its path, confronting nothing and seeking the path of least resistance. Water recognizes its unity with everything else even if we sometimes forget our own connections.

Summing Up the Readings

What are the boundaries of your own moral web? Whose interests must you consider when you decide to act? For many of us, the boundaries go no further than our own species. Kant's admonition to do our duty, by acting always so that we can will what we do to be universalized, takes only other humans into account. Jeremy Bentham, the founder of utilitarianism, extended his moral web to include all who can suffer. Clearly, this brings at least some other animals into the group whose pleasures and pains must be considered when we calculate the greatest good in the world at large. Living on the borderlands, as Gloria Anzaldúa recommends, offers a a unique standpoint for humanizing the "other." By broadening and deepening our consciousness, we have an ethical perspective from which to heal divisions.

Shifting away from what we should do and toward how we should be brings us to an ethic of care. If we think of ourselves as living within a network of care, our obligations may be extended widely and our caring may not always follow rigid rules. Sometimes, we may feel challenged to promote the good of a single being, whether or not this benefits the world at large. Among the Akan of West Africa, everyone in the community occupies a privileged position, as members of a kinship system that is larger than our Western nuclear families. As possessors of a spark of the divine being, all people will deserve our respect and hospitality. And, this is also the goal of mestiza consciousness—to bring excluded individuals and groups back into the web of moral beings, whose welfare we must consider as we safeguard our own.

Taoism, with its vision of interconnectedness, radically expands our moral web. In its vision, virtue lies in harmony; its opposite is disharmony or separation. Most highly prized is virtue in action. As in some Native American traditions, humans do not have the arrogance to think themselves the only valued species, and there is a general sense that we can learn from other life forms, including other animals, trees, even apparently inert objects like stones that have lived on earth longer than any of us.

Continuing to Question

1. If you were to treat all people always as ends in themselves (as Kant suggests) and never merely as means to your own ends, what might you have to avoid doing?
2. If no person may be labeled "other," how would our ethical decision making shift? What kinds of actions are possible only when their object is the "other"?