

# Ivanhoe — The Concept of de ("Virtue") in the Laozi

Philip J. Ivanhoe

## Introduction

The earliest versions of the text attributed to the mythical Laozi<sup>1</sup> announce it as a jing ("classic") concerning two basic notions: Dao ("Way") and de ("power" or "virtue"). From the Mawangdui texts, we know that this twofold division even predates the first use of the title Daodejing. There is more general agreement about the importance and meaning of the term Dao.<sup>2</sup> But the notion of de has received remarkably little attention, in this, its Daoist locus classicus.<sup>3</sup> In the introduction to his elegantly terse translation of the Daodejing, hereafter referred to as the Laozi, D. C. Lau goes so far as to assert that in the text the term de, "is not particularly important . . ."<sup>4</sup> However, the word appears in sixteen of the text's eighty-one short chapters for a total of forty-three times.<sup>5</sup> This and the fact that it appears in the title of the earliest versions of the Laozi is prima facie evidence that the idea is central to the text's elusive message.

I will argue that an understanding of the concept of de is indispensable for a full appreciation of the philosophy presented in the Laozi and that the view of de that we find in this text shares several important characteristics with an earlier conception found in Confucius's Analects. I begin by presenting a brief account of the earlier Confucian concept of de, focusing on three characteristics. The first is the attractive power of the person with de; the second is the distinctive effect of de upon those who come into its presence; the third is the relationship between de and wuwei ("non-action") in government. After laying out the Confucian precedent, I will describe and contrast it with Laozi's notion of de. As we shall see, the Daoist notion is similar though distinct from its Confucian antecedent. I will then present a brief discussion of Zhuangzi's notion of de in light of my analysis and suggest some ways in which these different senses of de may be of interest to contemporary ethicists.

## Confucius's Conception of de

In several of my works on the early Confucian tradition, I have developed a line of argument, first advanced by David S. Nivison, concerning the role of the concept of de in Confucian ethics.<sup>6</sup> My particular interest in the early Confucian concept of de has been the role it played in the development of an ethic of self-cultivation. In summary, my view is that in early Confucian writings, de took on a genuinely ethical sense. In its general use, it retained its older meaning of the characteristic function and power of a given thing: "virtue" in the sense of the Latin *virtus*. But in the specific case of the ethically cultivated individual it came to denote what I call "moral charisma," a kind of psychological power that accrues to virtuous individuals and allows them to attract and retain the support of others. Such power was particularly important for rulers, for it enabled them to attract loyal and worthy followers; it gave them a way to legitimize a noncoercive form of government. As we are told in Analects 2.1, "One who rules through de ('moral charisma') is like the Pole Star, which remains in its

place while all the myriad stars pay homage to it." The "magnetic personality" of the ethically good person is the first characteristic feature of de we want to explore: its attractive power.

As noted above, the ability to attract and inspire people through the power of moral charisma was particularly important for the king. This view can be seen as a descendent of earlier beliefs regarding the king's unique responsibility to attract and gain the support of the spirits on behalf of the people within his state. In Confucian writings such power is thought to be characteristic of any cultivated person. For example, consider Analects 12.19, an exchange between a senior minister of the state of Lu and

Confucius, "Ji Kangzi C0253-01.gif asked Confucius about government, saying, 'How about killing those without the Way in order to advance those with the Way?' Confucius replied, 'In your administration of government, why use killing? If you just desire the good yourself, the people will be good. The de of the cultivated individual is like wind. The de of the petty person is like grass. When the wind blows upon the grass it is sure to bend.'" In this and the passage quoted earlier, we see the second characteristic feature of de: its distinctive effect upon those who come into its presence. Moral charisma influences others to yield to, support and emulate the person who has it.

This is an extremely important feature of Confucian ethical thinking. It helps explain why Confucius and Confucians in general have such faith in the power of moral example. Morally cultivated individuals are thought to "transform wherever they pass by." 7 When, in Analects 9.14, Confucius expresses a desire to go and live among the nine barbarian tribes of the East, someone objects saying, "They are so crude." Confucius responds, "Were a cultivated person to live among them, what crudeness would there be?" Those in the presence of de come under its sway and are inspired to be virtuous themselves. Confucian de invokes a kind of psychological compulsion, to respond in kind to the treatment one receives. Kindness received elicits kindness from the recipient and thereby inspires them to become more virtuous. This idea is captured in a couplet which is now found in the Book of Poetry, wu yan buchou wu de bubao C0253-02.gif ("There are no words that are left unanswered, No de ('virtue' or 'kindness') left unrepaid").8

In terms of the administration of government, the distinctive effect of de on others allows the ideal Confucian ruler to exercise his authority without ever having to order people about, much less threaten them with force. By rectifying themselves and assuming their proper ritual station, sage-kings rule, or rather reign, through wuwei ("non-action").9 Though usually associated with Daoist philosophy, the first occurrence of this phrase is in Analects 15.5, "The Master said, 'Among those who reigned through wuwei ("non-action") there was Shun! For what did he ever do? All he did was maintain himself in a dignified manner and face to the south.'" This passage illustrates the third characteristic of de mentioned earlier: the close relationship between de ("moral charisma") and wuwei ("non-action"). A person who cultivates the right kind of de develops the moral charisma which both enables him to rule and justifies him as ruler. Since people naturally respond to the example of a morally good person, such a person need not employ force or any other form of coercion in order to rule. He rules through the power of ethical authority.

## De in the Laozi

In the Laozi we see a related but significantly distinct conception of de. There are correlates to all of our three characteristics (and other similarities besides), but each of these has its own distinctive expression. For example, Laozi shared with Confucius the belief that those who possess de will attract others to them. But the attractive power of Laozi's sage differs in character from that of the Confucian. The Confucian draws people toward him through the power of his ethical excellence, which inspires similar behavior and attitudes in others. He is like the Pole Star or the windforces above the people to which they submit or defer. This explains the sense in which the properly cultivated Confucian gentleman is thought to be wei ("awe-inspiring") to behold.<sup>10</sup> Laozi's sage also draws people to him, moves them to submit or defer, and influences them to behave in certain ways. But he draws people toward him and wins their allegiance by placing himself below them, welcoming all and putting them at ease. This is why one of Laozi's central metaphors for the Way is the valley:

Know the male,

But preserve the female,

And be a canyon to the world.

If you are a canyon to the world,

Your constant de ("virtue") will never leave you . . .

Know glory,

But preserve disgrace,

And be a valley to the world.

If you are a valley to the world,

Your constant virtue will be sufficient . . .<sup>11</sup>

Putting oneself last or below others increases and perfects one's de.<sup>12</sup> Another expression of the belief that placing oneself below others draws them into one's embrace is the idea that extending unqualified love even to those who wish one ill has the power to relieve their anger and even win them over. This is why the Laozi counsels us to bao yuan yi de ("Repay resentment with kindness").<sup>13</sup> "The mother" and "the female," which are thought to conquer through "stillness," "taking the lower position," "passivity," and "compassion," are other central metaphors for this characteristically Daoist ideal.<sup>14</sup> Only one who manifests such humble, accommodating, and nurturing "virtue" can legitimately rule. For only such a person embodies in human form a dynamic witnessed throughout Nature:

The reason why the River and the Sea are able to be king  
of the hundred valleys is that they excel in taking the

lower position . . .

Therefore, desiring to rule over the people,

One must in one's words humble oneself before them;

And, desiring to lead the people,

One must, in one's person, follow behind them . . .

That is why the empire supports him joyfully and never  
tires of doing so.<sup>15</sup>

For Laozi, the draw of de is not the awesome power of the Pole Star or the wind, but the natural tendency of things to migrate down toward low, safe, and inviting, terrain. The de of the Daoist sage is welcoming, accommodating, and nurturing not awe-inspiring like that of Confucius's sage. The Daoist sage "shines but does not dazzle."<sup>16</sup> De is a power that protects all ("the sage always excels in saving people, and so abandons no one; always excels in saving things, and so abandons nothing")<sup>17</sup> and nurtures all ("The Way gives them life; Virtue rears them").<sup>18</sup> Those who possess this kind of virtue not only command the respect and allegiance of other people, all creatures in the world find them attractive, "And so among the myriad creatures, none fail to revere the Way and honor virtue. But the Way is revered and virtue honored not because of some command but because this is naturally so."<sup>19</sup>

This last passage focuses our attention on another important feature of Laozi's conception of de, one that further tends to distinguish it from that of Confucius. While the latter believed that virtue was in some sense "natural" for human beings, he also held that the particular excellences human beings manifest set them not only apart from but above other creatures. Related to this, Confucius seems to have believed that de affects people but not other creatures or things. While this last point is surely not true of all later Confucians, Confucius himself, at least as he is represented in the Analects, never talks of de affecting anything other than people. Laozi rejects this more anthropocentric understanding of de. For him the power that accrues to those who embrace the Way affects the whole world. Those who have cultivated an abundance of de "virtue" are protected from natural harms. Not only people, but other creatures as well will honor and respect their special "power."

One who possesses virtue in abundance is comparable to

a new born babe;

Poisonous insects will not sting it;

Ferocious animals will not pounce on it;

Predatory birds will not swoop down upon it.

Its bones are weak and its sinews supple yet its hold is firm . . . <sup>20</sup>

If a ruler succeeds in cultivating and maintaining such de, by "holding fast" to the Dao, his power will transform heaven and earth,

Should lords and princes be able to hold fast to it  
The myriad creatures will submit of their own accord,  
Heaven and earth will unite and sweet dew will fall,  
And the people will be equitable, though no one so decrees.<sup>21</sup>

Let us now turn to our second characteristic of de, the particular effect it is supposed to have on those who come into its presence. We have already noted that unlike Confucius's de, which affects only other people, Laozi's "mysterious virtue" influences all of the myriad creatures and even inanimate natural phenomena. While these features of Laozi's view of de are worth extensive and careful consideration, given the purposes of the present study, we will concentrate on its characteristic effects on people.

In order to grasp the special effect de is supposed to have on people, it will be helpful to offer a brief sketch of what Laozi thought were the most pervasive and profound human failings. Put simply, he believed that humans err whenever they become overly reflective and "clever." This leads them to devise all sorts of artificial ways of being and deviate from their spontaneous tendencies and natural desires. This then carries them off in a vain pursuit of social goods like power, honor, wealth, and beauty and leads them to ignore and grow cold to the simple goods and basic natural desires which are the true source of satisfaction in life. Laozi's goal is to undo this process and return to a primitive agrarian utopia of small villages. Within states composed of such villages, people will pursue lives of simple pleasures. They:

Will return to the use of the knotted rope,  
Will find relish in their food  
And beauty in their clothes,  
Will be content in their abode  
And happy in the way they live. <sup>22</sup>

In order to reach this ideal, the Daoist ruler works to undo the damage of socialization. He eliminates and discourages technological innovation or any intellectual pursuits above those needed to carry out a basic country life. The Daoist path of spiritual improvement is one of paring away or relieving unnatural, distorting, and deforming influences and ideas and restoring original vitality and health.

Therefore in governing the people, the sage empties their minds but fills their bellies, weakens their wills but strengthens their bones. He always keeps them innocent of knowledge and free from desire, and ensures that the clever never dare to act.<sup>23</sup>

Confucius's *de* seeks to draw the ethically deficient up toward the ideal example of the sage. While not everyone will be equal in their attainment of this ideal and the different social stations people occupy will require them to manifest virtue in a variety of ways, they nevertheless aspire to a common goal: becoming a *junzi* ("gentleman"). Confucius sought to educate and develop people. This is the very opposite of Laozi's model. Instead of inspiring people to strive to develop themselves, he seeks for a way to empty, unravel, and settle them. This is the only way to cure them of the malaise of inauthenticity. Thus, for Laozi *de* has what I call a "therapeutic effect" upon others. It helps to put people at ease and enables them to become aware of their inauthentic behavior and attitudes. Like bringing into a calm consciousness some repressed anger or undetected self-deception, such awareness helps the afflicted slough off the baleful influences of socialization and excessive intellectualization.

But the Daoist is not seeking a Sartrean-style authenticity, i.e., a self forged out of a series of free acts of will. Nor is the Daoist's final goal a Freudian-style "mature" awareness of the true character of one's motivations. Daoist authenticity entails allowing one's spontaneous, prereflective nature to operate unencumbered and guide one through life. The awareness of what we might call our false social self is a stage—not the final state—in a process of cultivation leading to such a life. The Daoist believes that such awareness carries off not only one's false social consciousness but any strong sense of (or need for) a self apart from the spontaneous patterns and processes of Nature. Once the reassuring ease and tranquility of the sage has relieved others of their social posturing, they will begin to unselfconsciously follow and rest in their own particular natures.

Like the natural attractiveness of the Daoist sage described earlier, this dynamic between sages and those around them is understood simply as a human analogue to a widely attested natural phenomenon. Laozi believed that whatever is "still" naturally has the *de* ("power") to settle and govern that which is agitated or restless. For example, "Restlessness overcomes cold; stillness overcomes heat. Limpid and still, One can be a leader in the empire."<sup>24</sup> The Daoist sage emulates this natural pattern of influence and response by cultivating an extremely ethereal, tenuous, and still state of mind, "Cultivate extreme tenuousness; Preserve complete stillness."<sup>25</sup> Anyone who achieves and maintains this state of peace and purity generates the special *de* ("power") to settle others as well.

If a ruler can cultivate such *de* he will be able to eliminate all strife and contention within his state. Everything will then run smoothly as each person "returns to" and pursues his or her individual task with a natural spontaneity. The ruler himself will be functioning in complete harmony with the Way, which accomplishes everything but does not self-consciously strive for any particular end. Here we see the third characteristic of *de*: the intimate relationship between *de* and *wuwei* ("non-action") in government. The ideal Daoist ruler cultivates a still and tenuous state of mind. This generates *de*, which enables him to both attract others and move them to follow the Way. This however simply entails getting them to give up all the false beliefs and artificial practices that interfere with the spontaneous functioning of their natures. There is no additional work to be done above and beyond this:

The Way always is wuwei ("without action"),  
Yet nothing ever is left undone.  
Should lords and princes be able to hold fast to it,  
The myriad creatures will be transformed of their own accord.  
. . .if I cease to desire and remain still,  
The empire will be at peace of its own accord. 26

As mentioned earlier, Confucius too believed in an ideal wuwei ("non-active") form of government which was connected to his particular understanding of de. He believed the moral charisma of a sagely ruler enables him to reign through the power of ethical authority. In order for this to lead to the state of "non-active" rule, the sage must hold the attention of the people and inspire them to develop themselves into reliable ethical agents. In a state composed of such reliable ethical agents, the sagely ruler simply goes about his particular duties and allows others to pursue their respective tasks. He need not interfere (i.e., "act") in any direct manner in the administration of his rule.

The relationship between Laozi's notion of wuwei and his conception of de shares the general structure of the Confucian precedent but is quite different. The difference is largely the result of their dissimilar views regarding the character of human nature. Laozi believed that what people really needed in order to lead a happy and contented life were the goods associated with the simple agrarian utopia described above. Artificial social goals not only do not offer any real satisfaction; they spoil any chance for a happy and contented life. The social virtues so dear to the Confucians represent the decline of the Way. For the more aware and self-conscious the people become about what constitutes "virtue," the greater the possibility for deception and hypocrisy.

There is an obvious truth to this claim: for one cannot manipulate others by feigning virtue unless one understands how to do this.

And the greater one's understanding, the greater the possibility that one with such an aim will succeed. This helps us to understand why Laozi claims that the truly virtuous person does not consciously strive to be "virtuous" (i.e., in the normal socially sanctioned sense) nor does such a person need to self-consciously act in order to achieve. The virtue and actions of the sage are spontaneous and natural: like the flowing of water or the falling of timely rain. Any hint of self-conscious design or effort is a symptom of human cleverness and artificiality.

Of course, this picture of the ideal human life assumes that in the absence of striving, people will by nature gravitate toward the noncompetitive activities of the Daoist agrarian utopia and find these fully rewarding. But if we grant these assumptions, it is then easy to see why Laozi would believe that the process of spiritual cultivation leading to this ideal involves paring away and "returning" to an original, pristine natural state. We can also more fully appreciate the difference between this ideal and the Confucian developmental model of study and reflection:

In the pursuit of learning one knows more every day; in the pursuit of the way one does less every day. One does less and less until one does nothing at all, and when one does nothing at all there is nothing that is left undone. 27

These various and related beliefs also explain why Laozi describes the rise of a self-conscious understanding of morality as tracing the decline of genuine goodness:

Those with the highest virtue are not "virtuous"

And so possess virtue.

Those with the lowest virtue never fail to be "virtuous"

And so are without virtue.

Those with the highest virtue never act

Yet nothing ever is left undone.

Those with the lowest virtue act

Yet still have things to do. . . .

And so when the Way was lost there was virtue.

When virtue was lost there was benevolence.

When benevolence was lost there was right.

When right was lost there were the rituals.

The rituals are the wearing thin of loyalty and trustworthiness

And the harbinger of chaos . . . 28

The actions of the truly virtuous arise spontaneously from their nature. They are not so much their actions as they are the Dao acting through them. Such individuals have nothing they need to do (i.e., no personal goals to pursue), but this does not mean that they are inactive. When hungry they eat, when tired they rest. In spring they plant, in autumn they harvest. They move as their nature commands, in harmony with greater rhythms, and in so doing "nothing is left undone." Such a life generates an abundance of true virtue, which enables those who possess it to live safely and in harmony with all the world and bring peace and nourishment to all who come into their presence. This is the state from which the people have fallen and back to which the de of the sagely ruler is to lead.

We have seen that for Laozi, de is the "power" or "virtue" that accrues to those who attain a peaceful, tenuous, and still state of mind. In contrast to the Confucian process of self-cultivation, which consists of prolonged study and development, a person achieves the Daoist ideal by paring away the influences of socialization and intellectualization and "turning back" to a simple, agrarian way of life. Daoist de welcomes, accommodates, pacifies, and nurtures all who come into its presence. And so all



creatures find it attractive and worthy of reverence. The primary effect of Daoist de on other people is therapeutic and purgative. The natural simplicity and contentment of the sage helps others to recognize and shed the artificial beliefs and practices that deform and interfere with their original, spontaneous nature. The Laozi claims even greater power for "mysterious virtue," for its influence extends out to all creatures and even affects the rain and dew.

The power of de enables the ideal Daoist ruler to rule through wuwei ("non-action"). While Confucian rulers can rule through a related form of wuwei it is different from what we see in the Laozi. The de of the Confucian ruler allows him to attract and retain likeminded subordinates who join and are inspired by him to realize the ideal Confucian society. The force of his virtue is very much centripetal, drawing people in and up in a common cause. The de of the Daoist ruler also allows him to rule over a peaceful and flourishing country but he relies upon a different dynamic. His virtue relieves the tensions within his state, which are generated by the artificial desires foisted upon his people through the insidious influence of socialization and human "cleverness." This allows them to return to those pursuits that represent their genuine or natural desires: the life found in scattered, simple agricultural villages. The force of the de of Laozi's sage is very much centrifugal. It turns people away from those social goods, the "goods hard to come by," 29 which lead to competition, contention, and strife. It puts people at ease, brings them peace and allows them to settle down where they are. To "find relish in their food . . . beauty in their clothes, (to) be content in their abode, And happy in the way they live."

## **De in the Zhuangzi**

The concept of de is by no means restricted to the two texts that have served as the focus of the present study. Though it is not emphasized by most interpreters, it is of considerable importance in texts like the Zhuangzi as well. For example, in the fifth chapter, "The Sign of Virtue Complete," we find characters such as Aitai Tuo , who is described as quande zhi ren ("one of perfect virtue").<sup>30</sup> Aitai Tuo is a terribly ugly man who appears to be without any remarkable gifts or skills. And yet, "When men were around him, they thought only of him . . . and when women saw him they ran begging to their fathers and mothers, saying, 'I'd rather be this man's concubine than another man's wife!'"<sup>31</sup> We also are told that when summoned to court, Aitai Tuo quickly won the favor of Duke Ai of Lu, who wanted to entrust him with the administration of his entire kingdom. In this story we see the first of our three cardinal characteristics of de: its attractive power.

An earlier story in the same chapter illustrates our second characteristic of de: its effect on those who come within its presence. This story concerns Shentu Jia , a man who had lost a foot as punishment for an undisclosed crime. Through study with a Daoist master, he had learned to accept his fate, something we are told only a "man of virtue" can do. At one point, Shentu Jia describes the effect his master has had upon him, "There were many with two feet who laughed at me for having only one, which would whip me into a rage. But when I reached the Master's place, my anger dissipated and I would return home. I do not know how he washed me clean with goodness." <sup>32</sup> Here we see a poignant illustration of what earlier I called the "therapeutic effect" of Daoist virtue.

In these and other stories, Zhuangzi dramatically emphasizes the separation of true virtue and outward form. His sages are highly imperfect and undesirable from the point of view of society. But,

like the sage described by Confucius and Laozi, Zhuangzi's exemplars have a spiritual "power" that arises from their special character. Aitai Tuo draws people to him and relieves them of their cramped, socially sanctioned opinions of what is attractive and who would make a good minister. Shentu Jia's master stills the boiling rage within him.

Zhuangzi's notion of *de* is very much like Laozi's in being primarily "therapeutic" in its effect. But in at least one way it is more like that of Confucius than his fellow Daoist. For both Zhuangzi and Confucius, other people are attracted to the sage as an individual. The sage we encounter in the Laozi—like the text itself—is anonymous.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps of greater importance, Zhuangzi's concept of *de* differs from either of our other two thinkers in having no direct connection with a theory of government through *wuwei*. Those with virtue—including Zhuangzi himself—are on several occasions offered control of the government, but they always turn away from these offers, often mocking such proposals.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, while such a direct "use" of virtue is explicitly denied, there is a clear sense that one with great virtue is preserved from natural harms, as was the case in the Laozi. In chapter 1, we find the following description of the Holy or Spiritual Man:

This man with this *de* "virtue," is about to embrace the ten thousand things and roll them into one. Though the age calls for reform, why should he wear himself out over the affairs of the world? There is nothing that can harm this man. Though flood waters pile up to the sky, he will not drown. Though a great drought melts metal and stone and scorches the earth and hills, he will not be burned . . .<sup>35</sup>

A full account of Zhuangzi's concept of virtue is beyond the range of the present study. The preceding examples and observations are intended only to provide some evidence of the pervasiveness, importance, and richness of the concept of *de* among early Chinese philosophers. This is a topic worthy of sustained and careful study.

Beyond the importance the concept of *de* holds for our understanding of traditional Chinese thought is its potential to contribute to contemporary philosophical discussions, particularly in the field of virtue ethics. Contemporary Western philosophers, even those who work on the issues of character and the virtues, do not have anything quite like the Chinese notion that we have been exploring. <sup>36</sup> We tend to talk about virtue in the sense of various excellences of character not as a power that can affect others, arising from the possession of such excellences. Our attention has been focused, and often with good results, on the characteristics of various human excellences and how they fit together in a picture of human flourishing. We have not seriously considered how the example of such good people might affect the ethical lives of those around them and the communities in which they live. Such consideration might lead us to appreciate additional dimensions of value in traditional virtues.

## Conclusion

We have described two different notions of *de*, each of which points to real and important aspects of what we might call interpersonal moral psychology. The Confucian notion of *de* as moral charisma is a phenomenon familiar to many people. Morally excellent people, e.g., a Gandhi or a King, draw people to them and are inspiring and uplifting. This makes perfectly good sense. An important part of what it is for something to be a virtue, in the sense of a human excellence, is that it attracts,

inspires, and uplifts human beings. And most people, at least within a common community, understand enough of what makes virtue virtuous to feel some attraction to those who possess it in abundance.

The Daoist "therapeutic" understanding of virtue is equally illuminating. Once removed from its more dramatic metaphysical foundations, the core sense of Daoist *de* is not at all unknown to us though like moral charisma genuine cases of it are quite rare (which is part of what makes it so valuable). In the presence of those who are at peace with themselves, who are humble and who are open to and caring of others, we can find the beginning of a cure for some of our deepest, self-inflicted wounds. People who accept us as we are (no matter how bad we might be) and offer reassurance and support, perhaps even love, create a psychological space for profound self-understanding and transformation. The experience of being in the presence of a person with such "virtue" can result in a greater awareness of how much of our attention and energy is dedicated to maintaining various social masks, defensive postures, and outright self-deceptions. Reflected in the stillness of such individuals we have the chance to see ourselves and our society more clearly and perhaps even alter the way we perceive and act in the world. 37

## Notes

I want to thank Bryan W. Van Norden, Paul Kjellberg, Mark Csikszentmihalyi, and Ted Slingerland for helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this essay.

1. I will use the name of the mythical author of the text in order to facilitate my presentation. I think there was no such person and that the text is clearly a composite, cobbled together by some third century B.C.E. editor. Nevertheless, there was someone who at some point brought these various passages together and fashioned them into a single text. Extending my original analogy, there was a cobbler and as cobblers make shoes (even from scraps of leather) editors make coherent texts (even with passages from disparate sources). So referring to an author (in the sense of a creator) of the text seems well warranted. I see nothing wrong with calling him or her "Laozi" (lit., "The Old Master").

2. This is evident from the simple fact that almost every translator of the text renders the term as "Way." There is some disagreement as to the exact sense in which it is understood as a "transcendent" principle underlying the observable phenomena of the world. These disagreements strike me as more concerned with the particular metaphysics one sees in the text, specifically the existence or strength of dualism. But in almost every case, the Dao is understood as the underlying and unifying pattern beneath the play of events. The one dramatic exception to this generalization is Chad Hansen, who understands the Dao as something akin to "discourse." The point of the text then is to deny that there is any universal principle or pattern underlying the phenomena of the world. All we have are various linguistic schemes for carving up the world. See for example his *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 196-230.

3. The one notable exception to this is Roger Ames's essay, "Putting the Te Back into Taoism," in *Nature in Asian Traditions of Thought*, ed. J. Baird Callicott and Roger T. Ames (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 113-144. As best as I can tell, Ames's view is radically different from my own. He seems to regard *de* as a metaphysical feature of all living phenomena. For example, he says that *de*, "denotes the arising of the particular in a process vision of existence" (125). He further claims that it unifies all particular phenomena in a way reminiscent of Huayan Buddhism, "any particular *de* when viewed in terms of its intrinsic relatedness entails the full process of existence . . ." (128).

4. D. C. Lau, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (Rpt., London: Penguin Books, 1974), 42.

5. This number will vary slightly depending on which version of the text one takes as authoritative.

6. The most complete account of Nivison's views on *de* can be found in Bryan W. Van Norden, ed. *The Ways of Confucianism: Investigations in Chinese Philosophy*, (La Salle: Open Court Press, 1996): 17-57. My understanding of the concept can be found in my *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 1-7.

7. Mencius 7A13. Cf. 7B25. Similar lines occur in chapters 15 and 32 of the *Xunzi*. Donald Munro provides a remarkably thorough and insightful account of the role moral exemplars play in Chinese thought. See his *The Concept of Man in Early China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969).

8. Mao # 256. For a complete translation and the context of these lines, see James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 4 (Rpt., Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1970), 514.

9. Herrlee G. Creel is the first to comment on the Confucian examples of *wuwei*. His analysis differs from the one presented here but contains a wealth of examples and insights on this important concept. See "On the Origin of Wu-wei" in *What is Taoism?* (Rpt., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 48-78. An illuminating and more recent discussion of *wuwei* can be found in Schwartz's treatment of Daoism. See Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 186-254.

10. For examples, see Analects 1.8, 7.38 and 20.2 (2X). For a passage that evokes the awe-inspiring majesty of the gentleman with another metaphor that places him "above" the people (like the sun or the wind), see Analects 19.21.

11. Chapter 28. My translation. For other examples of the image of the valley, see chapters 6, 15, 39, and 41. See also the image of water in chapter 8, "Highest good is like water. Because water excels in benefiting the myriad creatures without contending with them and settles where none would like to be, it comes close to the way" (Lau, Lao Tzu, 64).

12. The idea that putting oneself beneath or humbling oneself before another increases one's *de* is a very old notion. In his discussion of an oracle bone inscription dating from around 1200 B.C.E. David S. Nivison describes how a Shang King puts himself beneath or at risk before the spirits. Nivison says, "In this rite in which the king as diviner-intermediary assists another person to get well . . . because of his willingness to put himself in danger on behalf of another, his *de*, 'virtue,' is magnified." See "'Virtue' in Bronze and Bone," in *The Ways of Confucianism*, ed. Van Norden, chapter three. The same dynamic can be seen in chapter 20 of the Analects. There we see King Tang pronounce to the spirits, "If I in my own person do any wrong, let it never be visited upon the many lands. But if anywhere in the many lands wrong is done, let it be visited upon my person" (Arthur Waley, *The Analects of Confucius* [New York: Vintage Books, 1938], 231).

13. Chapter 63. In Analects 14.36 this line is discussed. There Confucius rejects it and instead suggests one: "Repay resentment with uprightness and kindness with kindness." Compare these different teachings to the lines from the Book of Poetry quoted above.

14. For examples of the image of the mother, see chapters 1, 20, 25, 52, 59. For the image of the "female," see chapters 10 and 28.

15. Chapter 66; Lau, Lao Tzu, p. 128. See also chapter 32. Cf. chapter 7, "the sage puts his person last and it comes first, Treats it as extraneous to himself and it is preserved" (Lau, Lao Tzu, 63).

16. Chapter 58; Lau, Lao Tzu, 119.

17. Chapter 27; Lau, Lao Tzu, 84.

18. Chapter 51; Lau, Lao Tzu, 112.

19. Chapter 51; My translation.

20. Chapter 55; Lau, Lao Tzu, 116.

21. Chapter 32; Lau, Lao Tzu, 91.

22. Chapter 80; Lau, Lao Tzu, 142.

23. Chapter 3; Lau, Lao Tzu, 59. Cf. chapter 12 "the sage is for the belly, Not for the eye" (Lau, Lao Tzu, 68).

24. Chapter 45; Lau, Lao Tzu, 106. See also chapter 26, "The still is the lord of the restless" (Lau, Lao Tzu, 83).

25. Chapter 16. My translation.

26. Chapter 37; Adapted from Lau, Lao Tzu, 96. Cf. chapter 32 quoted above.

27. Chapter 48; Adapted from Lau, Lao Tzu, 109. See also the idea that the basic movement of the Dao is "turning back," chapters, 14, 16, 25, 40, 52, etc.

28. Chapter 38. My translation.

29. For this expression, see chapters 3, 12, and 64.

30. My translation. A complete translation of the story can be found in Burton Watson, trans., *Chuang Tzu: The Complete Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 70-71.

31. Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 72.

32. My translation. Both Watson and Graham have added a line immediately after the translated section which does not appear in the original and which changes the sense of the passage. Watson has, "I don't know whether he washes me clean with goodness or whether I come to understand things by myself." Graham has, "I do not know whether it is the Master cleansing me by his goodness or my own self-awakening." (Italics mine in both quotes.) See A. C. Graham, trans., *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), 78. They both appear to be following the commentary of Guo Xiang, who glosses the original line to this effect.

33. But even in this regard, the similarity with Confucius's sage is not complete. For Confucius most often holds up historical exemplars while Zhuangzi's sages are clearly literary creations. In a way, Zhuangzi's exemplars stand somewhere in between those of Confucius and Laozi.

34. One of the most delightful examples of this kind of story concerns Zhuangzi fishing in the Pu River. See Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 187-188.

35. Adapted from Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 33.

36. In some earlier traditions within the West, the idea that one can be transformed by the virtue of another is evident and important. Of particular note in this regard is the notion of Platonic Love as seen in works such as Plato's *Symposium* or Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

37. In his profound and disturbing account of wartime experiences, J. Glenn Gray describes his chance encounter with an old Italian hermit who embodies many of the qualities I have tried to describe here as Daoist "virtue." Glenn tells us, "there was about him a rare peaceableness and sanity . . . I felt in him the strength of his close association with the things of nature . . . he seemed to possess a constancy, patience and endurance not often known . . ." See *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*, (Rpt., New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 240-241. See also 18-21.