

Sabbatical Report

for

Jerrold R. Caplan

**Academic Year
2010-2011**

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My sabbatical during the academic year 2010-2011 took me to Santa Fe, New Mexico, where I spent the year enrolled in a three semester graduate program in Eastern Classics at St. John's College. The final semester concluded with a formal graduation ceremony on August 5, 2011 for which I donned cap and gown and received an M.A. in Eastern Classics.

The program at St. John's is unique in offering a rigorous one-year program of study in the foundational texts of Hinduism, Buddhism, and related works from China and Japan. The entire reading list can be seen at: http://www.stjohnscollege.edu/GI/EC/reading_list.shtml. In addition I undertook the study of Sanskrit, eventually culminating in translating one of the Upanishads and selections from the great Hindu epic, *The Mahabharata*. As far as I know there is no other program is eastern studies that offers the depth and breadth of study in such a condensed format. While this may sound boastful or exaggerated I emerged from the program feeling as if for the first time I understood the entire trajectory of thought in India, China, and Japan from the earliest beginnings to the full flowering of their respective philosophical and religious traditions. This is by no means to claim expertise in any of these areas, but I do claim familiarity with the foundational works and the knowledge of where to look for the emergence of the principal teachings.

As evidence of the work that I accomplished I have included here:

1. The program reading list from my M.A. program;
2. A copy of my transcript;
3. A photo of my M.A. diploma'
4. The eight papers that I wrote for the various classes that I took, one for each class.

I find it difficult to express how rewarding, successful, enriching, educational, and refreshing this year was for me. For some years prior I had been dabbling with eastern texts in philosophy both to enhance my teaching repertoire and to broaden my intellectual horizons. There was a

deficiency in my grasp of the principles of eastern thought, even though I had taught our own course Phil. 12 Survey of World Religions East. Since my return from sabbatical my enthusiasm for teaching this same course grew considerably. In the fall I was assigned one section and in the spring of 2012 two. It is with entirely new eyes that I teach this class now. The program has given me context. I can speak with new confidence about how the respective traditions developed, how some grew out of others, as in the case of Buddhism from Hinduism, which texts were original and crucial, and why certain texts were so important in shaping the practice of the various religions. I believe that my students have the sense that my command of the subject matter is more than adequate and in some areas, I would venture to say, extensive.

Equally important to me is the awareness I have developed of the parallel development of philosophy in the east and in the west. It is much easier for me to connect the thought of Confucius with that of Aristotle, or the life of the Buddha with the life of Jesus. The number of similarities in mythological origins and philosophy between east and west is truly astonishing, so much so that I have come to think more and more that the distinctions "Eastern" and "Western" with respect to philosophy is nothing more than a convenient artifice. Philosophy is philosophy and the perennial problems that humans face don't vary much from culture to culture, regardless of time and place.

Eastern philosophy had never been a big part of our philosophy program and the current academic climate is certainly not conducive to expansion. However, there has always been considerable interest in the thought and religions of the east and my goal for some time has been to become one of, if not THE instructor with a reputation for having a reliable grasp of the traditions of the east. At this point I feel as if I have achieved that. For this reason my gratitude for having been given the opportunity to achieve my goal and my appreciation for the sabbatical program are boundless.

Graduate Institute

Santa Fe

Seminar Reading List

Eastern Classics Program

FALL

Week One

Sima Qian, *The Grand Scribe's Records*, Volume 1. Edited by William H. Nienhauser, Jr. pp. 1-86. Photocopy available in bookstore.

Xiao Jing, *Classic of Filial Piety*, translated by James Legge. Photocopy available in bookstore.

Week Two

Confucius, *Confucius Analects: with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, translated by Edward Slingerland (Hackett), pp. 1-124.

Confucius Analects, pp. 125-235.

Week Three

Mo Tzu, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson (Columbia University Press), fascicles 8, 9, 11, 16, 17, 19, 20, 25, 26, 27 31, 32, 35, 39 . Fascicles 14, 15. Photocopy available in bookstore.

Mencius, Books I-II, translated by either David Hinton (Counterpoint), or by D.C. Lau (Penguin Classics).

Week Four

Mencius, Books III-IV.

Mencius, Books V-VI.

Week Five

Hsun Tzu, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson (Columbia University Press), sections 1, 2, 9, 15, 17, pp. 15-88.

Hsun Tzu, sections 19-23, pp. 89-171.

Week Six

Chuang Tzu, *The Book of Chuang Tzu*, translated by Martin Palmer with Elizabeth Breully (Shambhala), chapters 1-7.

Chuang Tzu, chapters 8-22.

Week Seven

Lao Tzu, *The Way of Lao Tzu*, translated by Wing-Tsit Chan (Macmillan), entire.

Han Fei Tzu, fascicles 20, 21. Photocopy available in bookstore.

Week Eight

Han Fei Tzu, *Basic Writings of Mo Tzu, Hsun Tzu, and Han Fei Tzu*, translated by Burton Watson, sections 5-10, pp. 16-72.

Han Fei Tzu, sections 12, 13, 17, 18, 49, 50, pp. 72-129.

Week Nine

Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty*, translated by Burton Watson (Columbia University Press), sections 6, 15, 61, 68, 79, pp. 35-99, 131-157, and section 61, photocopy available in bookstore.

Sima Qian, sections 85-88, 126, pp. 159-26, and "Sima Qian's Letter to Ren An," pp. 227-237.

Week Ten

Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty I*, translated by Burton Watson (Columbia University Press), sections 7, 8, 16, 48, 53, 55, 56, pp. 1-128.

Sima Qian, *Han Dynasty I*, sections 89-94 and 9-12, pp. 131-202 and 267-319.

Week Eleven

The Rig Veda: An Anthology, translated by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (Penguin), sections 10.129, 10.121, 10.90, 10.130, 10.190, 10.81-82, 10.72, 10.14, 10.16, 10.18, 10.154, 10.135, 10.58, 10.71, 10.125, 10.101, 10.151, 1.164, 1.163, 1.162, 10.56

The Rig Veda, sections 1.1, 1.26, 5.2, 2.35, 10.51, 10.124, 10.5, 8.79, 9.74, 4.58, 8.48, 10.136, 4.18, 10.28, 1.32, 2.12, 5.83, 7.101, 1.50, 1.160, 1.185, 6.70; 10.10, 1.179, 10.95, 10.85.

Week Twelve (Papers Due)

Brhadaranyaka Upanishad, parts I-II, in collections translated by either Patrick Olivelle (Oxford), or Robert Ernest Hume (Oxford).

Katha Upanishad.

Week Thirteen

Kena Upanishad and *Isha Upanishad*.

Thanksgiving: No Class.

Week Fourteen

Mundaka Upanishad, *Mandukya Upanishad*.

Maitri Upanishad.

Week Fifteen

Tattva-Kaumudi, karikas 1-29. Read both the Sankhya Karika verses and the commentary by Vacaspati Misra. Photocopy available in bookstore

Tattva-Kaumudi, karika 30 to end.

Week Sixteen

The Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali, translated by Hariharananda Aranya (SUNY Press), Books 1 and 2. Read both Patanjali's sutras and Vyasa's commentary.

The Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali, Books 3 and 4.

SPRING

Week One

The Bhagavad Gita in the Mahabharata, translated by J. A. B. van Buitenen (Chicago University Press), Books 1-9.

The Bhagavad Gita, Books 10-18.

Week Two

Charvaka section from *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, edited by S. Radhakrishnan and Charles Moore, pp. 236-246.

Kalidasa, *Kumarasambhava*, in *The Origin of the Young God*, translated by Hank Hifetz (University of California Press).

Week Three

Kalidasa, *Shakuntala*, in *Kalidasa: The Loom of Time*, translated by Chandra Rajan (Penguin Classics).

Abhinavagupta, *Dhvanyaloka* (with the *Locana* of Abhinavagupta), selections with supplemental material by Keith and Perry. Through p. 119. Photocopy available in bookstore.

Week Four

Dhvanyaloka, selections through p. 696.

"Discourses on the Noble Quest," "Discourse to Kalamas," "The Greater Discourse on Cause." *Early Buddhist Discourses* edited and translated by John Holder (Hackett Publishing).

Week Five

"The Greater Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness," "The Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving," "Discourse of the Honeyball."

"Short Discourses from the *Samyutta Nikaya*," "The Shorter Discourse to Malunkya-putta," "Discourse on the Parable of the Water Snake," "Discourse to Vacchagotta on Fire."

Week Six

"Discourse to Prince Abhaya," "Discourse to Potthapada," "Discourse on the Threefold knowledge"

"Discourse to Assalayana," "The Lion's Roar on the Wheel-Turning Monarch," "Discourse to the Layman Sigala"

Week Seven

The Lotus Sutra, chapters 1 (prose portion only), 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 (only the parable in the last

three paragraphs of the final prose section), 8, from *The Lotus Sutra*, translated by Burton Watson (Columbia University Press).

Lotus Sutra, chapters 10 (prose portion), 11 (verse only), 12, 13, 14 (prose portion), 16, 20 (prose portion), 21 (prose portion), 23 (prose portion), 25 (prose portion), 28.

Week Eight

Nagarjuna, *Mulamadhayamakakarika*, translated by Jay Garfield. Chapters 1-9.

Nagarjuna, Chapters 10-19.

SPRING BREAK

Week Nine

Nagarjuna, Chapters 20-27.

Vimalakirti Sutra, translated by Robert A. F. Thurman, sections 1-6.

Week Ten

Vimalakirti Sutra, 7-end. Gaudapada, *The Great Karika on the Mandukya Upanishad*, edited by Nikhilananda, pp. 223-368 (*Mandukya Upanishad* and Gaudapada commentary only. Omit other commentaries).

Week Eleven

Shankaracharya, *Upadesa Sahasri*, translated by Swami Jagadananda, Part 1 (pp.1-77), Part 2 (pp.79-150).

Upadesa Sahasri, Part 2 to end (pp.151-299).

Week Twelve

Ramanuja, *Gitabhasya*, pp. 48-58; 59-79; 91-107; 113-132; 175-176. Photocopy available in bookstore.

Jayadeva, *Gita Govinda*, in *Love Song of the Dark Lord*, edited and translated by Barbara Stoler Miller (Columbia University Press), pp. 69-125. [ESSAYS DUE]

Week Thirteen

The Diamond Sutra, in *The Diamond Sutra & the Sutra of Hui-Neng*, translated by A.F.

Price and Wong Mou-lam (Shambhala). pp. 17-53. *The Heart Sutra*, photocopy available in bookstore.

Hui Neng, *Commentary on the Diamond Sutra*, translated by Thomas Cleary (Shambhala).

Week Fourteen

Hui Neng, *The Sutra of Hui Neng*, translated by A. F. Price and Wong Mo Lam (Shambhala), or translated by Thomas Cleary (Shambhala), chapters 1-5.

The Sutra of Hui Neng, Chapter 6 to end.

Week Fifteen

The Great Learning and *The Doctrine of the Mean*, in *A Sourcebook of Chinese Philosophy*, translated and edited by Wing-Tsit Chan, pp. 84-114.

Chu Hsi, selection from Complete Works, in *A Sourcebook of Chinese Philosophy*, pp. 605-633.

Week Sixteen

Chu Hsi, pp. 634-53, 593-604

Wang Lang-Ming, *Inquiry of the Great Learning* and selections from *Instructions on Practical Living*, in *Sourcebook*, pp. 659-691.

SUMMER

Week One

The Tale of the Heike, translated by Helen Craig McCullough (Stanford University Press), Chapters 1-8.

The Tale of the Heike, Chapters 9-10.

Week Two

The Tale of the Heike, Chapters 11 - end.

Kukai, *The Meanings of Sound, Word, and Reality*, from *Kukai: Major Works*, translated and edited by Yoshito S. Hakeda (Columbia University Press). pp. 234-246. Photocopy available in bookstore.

Week Three

Sei Shonagon, *The Pillow Book*, translated by Meredith McKinney (Penguin Classics), pp. 2-112.

The Pillow Book, pp. 112-189, plus sections 243, 258, 273, S 29.

Week Four

Kamo no Chomei, "Record of the Ten-Foot Square Hut," in *Four Huts: Asian Writings on the Simple Life*, translated by Burton Watson (Shambhala).

Dogen, "Bendowa," in *The Heart of Dogen's Shobogenzo*, translated by Waddell and Abe (SUNY Press).

Week Five

Dogen, "Bussho," pp. 59-bottom of 84.

"Bussho," pp. 84-98.

Week Six

Dogen, "Genjokoan."

Dogen, "Uji."

Week Seven

Kenko, *Essays in Idleness*, translated by Donald Keene (Columbia University Press), Sections 1-38, 43-49, 52-53, 58-60, 66.

Kenko, Sections 69-75, 81-85, 89, 92, 97-98, 104-122, 127-130, 133, 137, 154, 162, 166, 184, 188, 190, 191, 235-237.

Week Eight

Basho, "Journey of Bleached Bones in a Field," "Kashimo Journal," "Knapsack Notebook," "Sarashine Journal" in *Basho's Journey: The Literary Prose of Matsuo Basho*, translated by David Landis Barnhill (SUNY Press).

Basho, "The Narrow Road to the Deep North."

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List of Papers Written for Classes

Hsun-Tzu's "Science" of Politics

A Brief Analysis of Dependent Arising Based on "The Greater Discourse on Cause"

A Brief Reflection on Kamo No Chomei's *The Ten Foot Square Hut*

The Unusual Language of Chuang-tzu

The Importance of Human Sexuality in the *Mahabharata*

The Politics of the Buddha: A Commentary on the Mahaparinibbana Sutta

Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322): *Elegant Rocks and Sparse Trees*

Tamakazura: The Wild Carnation in *The Tale of Genji*

Hsun-tzu's "Science" of Politics

Of all of the Chinese authors read this semester the selections that we read from the writings of Hsun-tzu give the most rational, complete, and integrated analysis of human nature. Hsun-tzu puts his political teaching on firm, rational grounds and gives an account of The Way that is more the product of human design and understanding than divine intervention. To alter Cicero slightly, one might say that Hsun-tzu brings political philosophy "down from the Heavens."

When reading Hsun-tzu's political philosophy, it's hard not to think of Aristotle, who presents such a complete account, grounded in a well-developed philosophy of nature and specifically human nature. He also provides a detailed treatment of the human soul. All of this ultimately rests on a rational metaphysics. Hsun-tzu, by contrast, offers little approaching Aristotle's complete philosophy of ethics, politics, and metaphysics. However, based on what he does provide, which includes an analysis of the faculties of the soul, a kind of psychology, as well as a treatment of human reasoning, a kind of logic, I argue that he gives the most complete account of human nature and thereby the most grounded account of political philosophy of all of his predecessors and contemporaries.

Among the schools of Chinese thought read this semester one might argue that their fundamental differences stem from their disagreements about human nature. The Confucians take human nature as fundamentally good while the Legalists, whose principal spokesperson is Han Fei-tzu, hold the opposite to be the case. The case of Hsun-tzu is rather more complicated owing to the fact that he names one of his chapters "Man's Nature is Evil." On this basis alone one might well associate him with his Legalist successors. Yet, Hsun-tzu strongly emphasizes the education and perfection of human nature as a way of achieving human goodness, unlike his successor, Han Fei, who accepts evil as the ineluctable human condition and devises ways to control and mitigate it. In light of this Hsun-tzu appears to have much more in common with his Confucian predecessors than the Legalists.

Much is at stake in this debate about human nature, since those views account for the differences in political thought and ultimately in policy. Like Aristotle, Hsun-tzu understands that to prescribe the best political order one must begin with the science of human nature and that, in turn, requires an understanding of nature itself. While Hsun-tzu's treatment of nature in general is somewhat cursory, his discussion of human nature is more developed as evidenced by his psychology and logic, which make him the most "scientific" of the early Chinese thinkers. Before

addressing his teaching on human nature I will try to summarize some of his salient views on nature in general.

Hsun-tzu on Nature

Hsun-tzu might be linked with those western thinkers who subscribe to the tradition of natural law. Thinkers in the west from the time of Aristotle have argued for an ordered universe that reveals a hierarchical arrangement descending from highest to lowest. From this, it follows that an understanding of the order in the universe is necessary for the proper ordering of the human soul, for which the eternal order inherent in the universe becomes a model. Perhaps the most prominent argument of this type is that of St. Thomas Aquinas, who divides the various orders or “laws” of the universe into four: eternal, natural, human, and divine. One sees in Hsun-tzu a similar argument, even if not as well developed, that there is in the world a natural hierarchy of higher and lower, not of human making. “The very existence of Heaven and Earth exemplifies the principle of higher and lower” (Hsun-tzu, 36). One sees the governance of Heaven in the workings of nature, which operates by constant, regular change, from which one can derive laws of cause and effect. “Heaven’s ways are constant” (79). The regularity in nature is both apparent and intelligible. “Every phenomenon that appears must have a cause Trees of the same species grow together; birds and beasts gather in herds; for all things follow after their own kind” (17). Nature instructs us importantly about its hierarchical arrangement, which is indispensable for politics, insofar as it leads one to conclude that the order in things has a rational basis. To act in accordance with the perceived order brings about harmony and peace. To act contrary to it results in quarrelsomeness and evil.

While he argues that the laws of nature are constant, there are some occurrences that are outside of human understanding.

When stars fall or trees make strange sounds, all the people in the country are terrified and go about asking, “Why has this happened?” For no special reason, I reply. It is simply that, with the changes of Heaven and earth and the mutations of the yin and yang, such things once in a while occur. (83-84)

There are accidents in nature, which may be beyond comprehension,¹ but that does not mean that they are not in accord with the constancy of Heaven. It simply means that human understanding has not yet understood all of Heaven’s ways, but one should not fear such things. Hsun-tzu insists that whatever occurs in nature must be part of the ways of Heaven and not something supernatural.

¹ Akin to what Aristotle calls “luck” and “spontaneity” in Book II, Chapters 4 and 5 of the *Physics*

To think otherwise is “unfortunate” (85). Furthermore, divination is merely something ornamental (85), not something that can reveal true causes. Hence, one may pray for rain, but whether it rains or not has no connection to such activities. Nature has its own ways. It is left to humans to discover these ways through education.

Since Hsun-tzu distinguishes the ways of Heaven from those on Earth, we might conclude that he attributes to the ways of Heaven what western thinkers attribute to the eternal law. If that is the case, then “The Way” seems to be the implementation in earthly matters of what one learns from studying the ways of Heaven. On the basis of such a distinction, we can draw a parallel between the ways of Heaven for Hsun-tzu and metaphysics for western thinkers like Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. However, Hsun-tzu prescinds from metaphysics as something outside of the realm of human understanding. In his chapter on Heaven, he remarks,

All things obtain what is congenial to them and come to life, receive what is nourishing to them and grow to completion, but none understands the formless forces that bring it about. Hence it is called the accomplishment of Heaven. Only the sage does not seek to understand Heaven. (80)

The sage has a deeper understanding about the limits of human understanding and does not waste time attempting to know what is not given to human reason to know.

Hsun-tzu’s treatment of nature is admittedly rudimentary owing to the fact that his interest is not primarily in the natural world as a whole, but in the world of men. One studies nature principally for what it can teach about human affairs and the proper ordering of a society. One sees that the principles of human nature are simply part of a larger whole. There is harmony between Heaven and Earth and Hsun-tzu makes it clear that whoever fails to see that will not be able to reach the right conclusions about human society.

When he turns his thoughts to Heaven, he seeks to understand only those phenomena which can be regularly expected. When he turns his thoughts to earth, he seeks to understand only those aspects that can be taken advantage of. When he turns his thoughts to the four seasons, he seeks to understand only the changes that will affect his undertakings. When he turns his thoughts to the yin and yang, he seeks to understand only the modulations which call for some action on his part. The experts may study Heaven; the ruler himself should concentrate on the Way. (81)

The study of nature is practical, especially as it instructs our social lives. By eliminating divination, shamanism, and other kinds of supernatural beliefs as being of no value, Hsun-tzu looks to nature as the true teacher of human affairs, but the only aspect of it available for human understanding is human nature. Those who achieve the highest understanding of human nature reveal themselves as

those best equipped to rule. We turn, therefore, to Hsun-tzu's more detailed account of human nature.

Hsun-Tzu on Human Nature

Hsun-tzu's argument for the natural hierarchy of things, while reserving the highest realm for heaven, gives man pride of place among earthly beings. "Man possesses energy, life, intelligence, and, in addition, a sense of duty. Therefore he is the noblest being on earth" (45).² In this remark alone one sees a progression from mere life to intelligent life, which occupies a privileged place in the hierarchy and only man possesses it. Intelligence implies several things. The most important inference is that men are naturally social. "Men, once born, must organize themselves into a society. But if they form a society without hierarchical divisions, then there will be quarreling" (46). However, the need to organize as social beings leaves open many possible social arrangements. Hsun-tzu is quite clear that just as there is a universal hierarchy between Heaven and Earth, so there must be a social hierarchy among men. "The reason men are able to harmonize their actions with the order of the seasons, utilize all things, and bring universal profit to the world is simply this: they have established hierarchical divisions and possess a sense of duty" (46). Two things follow from this observation. First, the social hierarchy needs to be established by men. It does not arise simply by nature. Since Hsun-tzu has already argued for the privileged place of intelligence in the human order, we can conclude that the social arrangement requires the rule of intelligence. Second, a corollary of intelligence as a unique human possession is a sense of duty, a necessarily social concern. We are left to consider by means of what principles is the social order that favors intelligence arranged and to what end is duty invoked? The former is best addressed by adverting to what could rightly be called Hsun-tzu's psychology. The latter will be discussed below.

The Soul

Since so much of Hsun-tzu's writing directs itself to human nature, some attention must be paid to human psychology, even though there does not seem to be a detailed, thematic treatment of the matter. We turn to the chapter on "Rectifying Names" to piece together his views on the soul.³ Man's basic nature is received from Heaven (151). The particulars of personality and the relationships among the various mental faculties are beyond human knowing. Nevertheless, human

² Also "Among creatures of blood and breath, none has greater understanding than man," 106.

³ What follows is meant to be a summary of Hsun-tzu's argument from Section 22, "Rectifying Names," 150-56.

nature is fixed in the sense that all humans begin with the same distribution of basic faculties. The mind is the highest human faculty and “the ruler of the body” (129). Emotions are given with our natures and their responses are our desires, which every living being possesses. All desires seek their fulfillment, but not all desires are good and many interfere with social order, leading some thinkers to conclude that the path to good government is the removal or lessening of desire.

According to Hsun-tzu, these thinkers fail to properly understand human nature, which cannot exist without desire and, therefore, they fail to realize that the proper path to good government is not the removal, but the education of desire. It is the role of the intellect to find the means to the satisfaction of desires as well as to moderate the extent to which one seeks their satisfaction.⁴

Hsun-tzu shows that it is not within the scope of the power of the intellect to satisfy all desires for external things, and continual frustrations of such attempts will ultimately lead to anxiety and terror. The true goal ought to be to produce a mind that is calm and at ease and this is the goal of good government. To live in harmony means to live with benevolence and righteousness, which is to live according to The Way. It follows that the goals of political rule are inseparable from morality and aim at governance that promotes harmony.

The model for this ordering is inherent in the eternal order or, what Hsun-tzu calls the Way of Heaven. As just one example of the Heavenly order, Hsun-tzu devotes an entire chapter to the salutary effect of music, especially in combination with rites, both for its aesthetic joy and its political value in promoting harmony. “Music embodies an unchanging harmony, while rites represent unalterable reason. Music unites that which is the same; rites distinguish that which is different; and through the combination of rites and music the human heart is governed” (117). Among his adversaries, the Mohist fail to see the value of music, because they haven’t understood the underlying principles of human nature, in particular the emotions, which respond to music’s harmony and beauty. Music is therefore indispensable as a means of promoting order in society.

One might reasonably conclude from the above discussion that human nature has two competing primary faculties: thought and desire. Furthermore, desires vary from person to person, both in kind and extent, but whatever they happen to be, they are implanted at birth. “The desire itself, which arises before one knows whether or not it can be satisfied, comes from the nature received at birth” (151). However, Hsun-tzu argues that whatever our starting point by nature, we are capable of being molded through education and experience as well as good governance,

⁴ One hears echoes of Hobbes’ *Leviathan* here, Chapter 8, “The thoughts are to the desires as scouts and spies to range abroad to find the means of their satisfaction.” One finds much here reminiscent of Hobbes, especially in Hsun-tzu’s chapter on “Improving Yourself” where he gives names to various kinds of human characteristics like “wisdom,” “honesty,” “deceit,” “perfidy,” etc., much as Hobbes does in Chapter 6 of *Leviathan* in his discussion of the passions. Just as Hobbes bases his analysis of the passions on the study of motion and the mechanical nature of all

assuming that we apply our own human industry. "The gentleman is by birth no different from any other man; it is just that he is good at making use of things" (16). Hence, while the raw material is the same for all, the final result is entirely a product of the effort one expends in improving it.

In one of the most telling chapters of his treatise, "Dispelling Obsessions," Hsun-tzu criticizes some of his predecessors and contemporaries, such as Mo-tzu, Sung-tzu, Hui-tzu, and Chuang-tzu for being too narrowly focused. For example, Mo-tzu obsesses too much on utilitarian considerations, Hui-tzu obsesses too much on words, and Chuang-tzu too much on Heaven (see 125). Collectively their common failing is not having discovered the proper use of the mind, for its goal ought to be understanding the Way. Hsun-tzu comes up with a formula for success: the mind must be empty, unified, and still (127 bottom). He asserts that no matter how much memory is stored up in the mind, there is always room for new impressions. By empty he means open-minded, receptive to change, willing to look at things from a new perspective. All of the targets of his criticism lack open-mindedness and subsequently became too rigidly attached to their own narrow focus. Since experience produces a myriad of impressions in the mind, there is great variety and diversity in our experiences of the world and, yet, this does not inhibit us from becoming firm and fixed in our understanding. So, the mind's capacity for diversity is not an impediment to achieving a unified vision of reality. Likewise, the rich variety of intellectual experience represents a perpetual movement of the mind from one object of thought to another. Nevertheless, when one achieves understanding and seizes on the true object of understanding, one achieves stillness in thought. So emptiness or open-mindedness, unity, and stillness are the characteristics needed by the sage who plans to rule. The proper use of the mind draws out from one's limited experience the necessary general truths about human nature that make it possible for one to "sit in his room and view the entire area within the four seas" (129).

If Hsun-tzu sees human nature as something receptive to education and training, and ultimately perfectible, one wonders why he assumes that man's nature is evil rather than agreeing with Aristotle in Book II of the *Ethics* that we are neither good nor bad by nature, but possess the potential for either. His reason is that human nature necessarily includes desires and emotion, which inevitably incline toward their satisfaction. Most desires are for external things, which are impossible to satisfy entirely and the ensuing failure leads to anxiety, disaffection, and excess. He invokes the ancient sage kings, as being in league with his view, against the view of Mencius that humans are by nature good, and insists that goodness does not come by nature simply, but is the result of "conscious activity" (158). What distinguishes various types of men, from common and petty, to gentlemen and sages, must be the extent to which they persevere and use conscious activity

things, and thus claim for himself the title of first true "political scientist," so, too, does Hsun-tzu

to transform their natural evil tendencies. "In respect to human nature the sage is the same as all other men and does not surpass them; it is only in his conscious activity that he differs from and surpasses other men" (161). So Hsun-tzu's ultimate aim appears to be the transformation of human nature, from its inclination to evil to the effortful achievement of goodness. One must harness the power of the mind, or what he calls its "conscious activity," since it is the natural ruler of the body, to effect the transformation. At this point it will help to examine his more detailed account of the activity of mind, which I take as his presentation on logic.

Logic

One may well regard Hsun-tzu's discussion of "Rectifying Names" (section 22) as his treatise on logic. He is very much beholden to Confucius, who introduced the same concept, the rectification of names in the *Analects* XIII. 3, primarily for the political value it contributes to orderly rule. Hsun-tzu has a similar aim. "When the king sets about regulating names, if the names and the realities to which they apply are made fixed and clear, so that he can carry out the Way and communicate his intentions to others, then he may guide the people with circumspection and unify them" (141). Yet, Hsun-tzu delves deeper than did Confucius into the underlying relationship between speech and beings in a way that reminds us of Aristotle, who says at the beginning of *De Interpretatione*,

Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, which these directly symbolize, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images. ()

Aristotle recognized that the symbols of spoken words are mere conventions that vary as much as cultures vary, but the thoughts and the things that our thoughts intend are the same for all. There is a world of experience that is the same for all beings and those beings gifted with speech are all attempting to describe and understand the same reality. Hence, logic, the science by means of which we reason about our own thought, is not merely word manipulation, but ultimately in the service of reasoning to the truth, which is the same for all. Hsun-tzu is very much in this tradition of seeing logic as a means of reasoning to the truth. He is acutely aware of the distinction between *nomos* and *phusis* and he bemoans the fact that in his day men have become far more careless in their use of speech and fail to take the measures which wisdom dictates namely, "to set up the proper distinctions and to regulate names so that they will apply correctly to the realities they designate" (p. 142). Hsun-tzu explains that this is accomplished by means of the senses in

attempt to give a "scientific" account of the faculties of the soul.

discriminating sameness and difference, which when properly done allows for the assigning of names. From the particular names that one assigns, one is able to establish more general terms of designation, as if distinguishing genus and species. While the names themselves "have no intrinsic reality," the reality behind the name is unchanging (144).

Hsun-tzu's brief excursus into logic is absolutely indispensable for the education of the gentleman and indispensable for proper rule, for words give expression to understanding and, in this manner, the Way is revealed. "Discourse and explanation are the means by which the mind gives form to the Way. The mind is the supervisor of the Way, and the Way is the foundation of good government" (147). More and more one sees that the Way, even if in accord with the hierarchical order inherent in the world, is still very much beholden to men of understanding if it is to have any practical consequence.

The proper cultivation of the mind underlies the political hierarchy in Hsun-tzu's scheme. He suggests a four-fold hierarchy descending from the sage to the gentleman to the officials, and finally to the common people (see 110 as well as bottom of 168, where he distinguishes the understanding of the sage, the gentleman, the man of breeding, the petty man and the menial). Whereas the sage understands the principles of governance based on ritual, the common people accept them as custom. Either way ritual preserves the order inherent in nature. Those with greater understanding rule, those with lesser understanding follow, not as a matter of reward and punishment, but according to what is best and most profitable for all. "In the world those who obey the dictates of ritual will achieve order; those who turn against them will suffer disorder . . . this is something the petty man cannot comprehend" (94). Intelligence is the ruling principle.

The natural order of things calls for the rule of the gentleman, who develops into the sage or the king through learning. By nature, humans are quite the same, but education and upbringing make the difference between the gentleman and the brigand. "Children born among the Han or the Yueh people of the south and among the Mo barbarians of the north cry with the same voice at birth, but as they grow older they follow different customs. Education causes them to differ" (15).

Returning to the question posed earlier (4 above) about the role of duty, we can now say that the first call of duty, which is unique to humans, is to acquire education. But men need more than mere education. They require ritual, which provides the molding of character. Reminiscent of Aristotle's description of politics as the architectonic science in Book I of the *Ethics*, Hsun-tzu regards political rule similarly and speaks of the ruler as "one who is good at organizing men in society" (46). The ruler is the archon, who arranges the social hierarchy according to various talents and abilities. The hierarchy is the order, implemented by the ruler on the basis of ritual, for it is ritual that teaches each member of society his proper place in relation to parents, ruler, elders, or superiors. Perfection arises from the instruction in and the command of ritual, which Hsun-tzu calls "the highest point of the Way and its power" (19). Rites are the human principles of order

meant to mirror the heavens, because their practice promotes and preserves the natural hierarchy, which is beneficial for everyone, not merely for those on top. Furthermore, rites are eminently rational and, while aesthetically important, they afford valuable practical lessons. Thus, when good order combines with good reason “this is called the highest flourishing of rites” (93). Proper conduct regarding ritual perfects the social order, for which reason Hsun-tzu says, “rites are the highest achievement of the Way of man” (95). The natural ruler, therefore, is the sage, “who knows how to think and to be steadfast, and in addition has a true love of ritual” (95) not owing to birth or inheritance, but to his understanding of the political importance of rites.

In Hsun-tzu’s account The Way is not something arbitrarily bestowed by some divine power, but something achieved by human industry. He places a premium on persistence and proper choices. “Achievement consists in never giving up” (18). Making the right choices accords with benevolence and righteousness and that means placing oneself in the company of those suitable for the cultivation of virtue. Hsun-tzu places ultimate responsibility for human virtue or vice on the individual. “The glory or shame that comes to a man are no more than the image of his virtue” (17). The Confucians claim that virtue has the power to transform and Hsun-tzu concurs in arguing that the man of breeding, in following the correct educational path, will prefer right to wrong and take pleasure in the right (22).⁵ True education issues in “the complete man,” one who is self-ordered according to the natural hierarchy that accords human intelligence the highest place on earth. Thus, the highest duty is towards education, because education perfects nature.

We see from all of this that just as there is a hierarchy in nature, there is a hierarchy of human types, whose final stages lead one from that of the gentleman to the sage. The sage is the perfection of the gentleman, who acquires his status from learning the correct use of ritual. Everything in this argument reveals the Confucian nature of Hsun-tzu’s teaching. “The sage has complete mastery of all moral principles; the king has complete master of all regulations of society” (136). The sage king, who rules according to the highest intelligence, is the model for behavior and rites.

While Hsun-tzu offers the sage king as the perfection of human nature and “the highest norm,” he speaks of his ruler as an “ideal” (136). Are we to assume that Hsun-tzu intends for his teaching to be instantiated? “All creatures of the universe, all who belong to the species man, must await the sage before they can attain their proper places” (103). Hsun-tzu’s emphasis on the transformative power of education and the proper use of ritual lead to the conclusion that a well organized society can be achieved, because the rule of a sage is a real possibility. In fact, we might suppose that, if pressed, he might well fault his Confucian predecessors, who in their frequent references to the ancient sage kings, reveal an over reliance on models whose efficacy for well over

five hundred years has been negligible. Hsun-tzu does make occasional references to the ancient sages, perhaps for the sake of form, but far less frequently. Good rule is a matter of choice, based on education and the implementation of ritual, whose mastery requires a true understanding of human nature. Where Hsun-tzu excels and, perhaps, surpasses his Confucian predecessors, is in his deeper penetration into the “science” of human nature. Hence, one no longer needs the models of ancient sages. He who chooses well can control others by imposing the order discovered in nature. Education and dedicated practice supplant the mandate of Heaven.

⁵ One is reminded of Book V of Plato's *Republic* in which the philosopher is distinguished from the lovers of sights and sounds as the one who “loves the sight of the truth.”

A Brief Analysis of Dependent Arising Based on “The Greater Discourse on Cause”

The core of early Buddhist teachings emanate from the Buddha's claims that suffering is the fundamental fact about existence and that the Buddha has uniquely discovered the path leading to the cessation of suffering.¹ Suffering is not a chance occurrence according to Buddhist teaching. It is the fundamental condition of things in the phenomenal world. Hence, one cannot reliably remove the immediate cause of suffering any more than one can remove death or aging. One must overcome the effect by transcending the cause, but such transcendence occurs only by means of understanding the complex network of causes and conditions that serve as the ground for suffering. So, suffering itself becomes the motive for its overcoming and the ultimate goal of enlightenment. Once one entertains the idea of the liberation from suffering, it serves as a kind of final cause leading away from suffering towards liberation as the end. The end becomes the beginning.

After the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths, which include the two previous claims of suffering and the path to its overcoming, arguably the most important teaching from the earlier discourses is the doctrine of dependent arising. As a teaching it is foundational, because the steps in the teaching lead to the explanation of suffering, the first noble truth and the foundation of all early Buddhist teachings. In one of the middle length discourses the Buddha says, “One who sees dependent origination sees the *Dhamma*; one who sees the *Dhamma* sees dependent origination.”² If the aim of the Buddhist teaching is the cessation of suffering, one must be persuaded of the primacy of the claim that suffering is the paramount fact of human existence.

The awareness of suffering cannot merely be “I am in pain and distress” or “I am growing old and dying.” If one views suffering as a temporary condition to be removed, one would seek to eliminate the immediate cause, which, once eliminated, would merely open the way for another set of unanticipated conditions that might lead to pain and distress. One must penetrate to the root cause

¹ “I declare *only* suffering and the cessation of suffering (my emphasis).” “Discourse on the Parable of the Water Snake,” *Early Buddhist Discourses*, 115. Henceforth, *EBD*).

of suffering itself, but to do this one must understand dependent arising, which describes this cause or, rather, series of causes. If one succeeds in this, then the realization “I am growing old and dying” is no longer a cause of suffering, since it is only a temporary, ephemeral state in a cycle of unending change. A proper understanding of dependent arising serves as the bridge from the awareness of suffering to liberation from it.

But why should an understanding of the nexus of causes that produce suffering and make it the fundamental fact of existence be necessary for liberation from this cycle of causation and ultimately the cessation of suffering? Why should understanding dependent arising break the cycle of *samsara*? Is understanding alone sufficient? The answer in the Buddha’s discourses is unequivocally “yes.”

In most accounts of dependent arising, the first explanatory step in the argument is ignorance, which leads us to believe that we have agency of the sort that both causes and relieves suffering. This promotes the belief that we have a self, which initiates actions and thereby causes consequences. Depending on the consequences of our actions, we incur karmic merit or its opposite. In short, we proceed as if we are entirely responsible for our suffering or our salvation. In one sense, this is true, namely insofar as we can adjust our understanding to relinquish this view of self and agency, by means of which we can achieve the cessation of suffering and thereby begin the path towards liberation. Generally, however, it is this common belief that we somehow merit or earn liberation that impedes liberation. Such a belief is a form of ignorance that must be removed and the path to its removal is to understand the conditional nature of all being. This is explained by the Buddha’s doctrine of dependent arising.

Dependent arising is a complex doctrine, so much so that the Buddha, upon attaining enlightenment, initially decided against attempting to teach it.³ He also reprimands his faithful attendant, Ananda, for overestimating the ease of understanding the doctrine, when Ananda declares

² *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, Majjhima Nikaya*, “The Simile of the Elephant’s Footprint” (Greater), Sutta 28, section 38.

³ *Majjhima Nikaya*, “Discourse on the Noble Quest,” Sutta 26, section 19; in *Early Buddhist Discourses*, 10.

that the doctrine appears to him “as clear as clear can be” (*EBD*, 28). The doctrine is sometimes presented in twelve steps,⁴ although one of the primary texts that present the doctrine, “The Greater Discourse on Cause,” offers only ten steps (or nine if one does not count psycho-physicality twice), but clearly intends the same overall explanation as the other. Either way, it is inescapable that the Buddha presents a teaching that relates consciousness and human existence to suffering.

Dependent arising is a doctrine intended to explain phenomena as interrelated. It claims that everything that exists is conditioned by something else and depends for its existence on some set of conditions. There is no such thing as an object that exists in and of itself. For every effect there is a preceding cause or condition or set of conditions. The teaching purports to explain the interrelated series of causes and effects, beginning with ignorance and leading to suffering, which is often simply equated with aging and death. Each member of the series is said to be the cause and the condition of the following member. The doctrine of dependent arising comes about primarily to combat the view of a permanent self. It is an abject denial of any claim to permanence, especially of a self. For this reason it appears very much to be a kind of materialist doctrine. It is precisely the commonplace conception of a self with an individual personality and identity that presents the chief obstacle to the Buddhist teaching. In the “Discourse on the Parable of the Water Snake” the Buddha says this explicitly. “I, too, do not see a way that one could grasp onto the doctrine of attachment to a permanent Self that would not give rise to sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, and distress” (*EBD*, 111). If, contrary to the Buddha’s teaching, one believes that one has a self, then one believes that it is a unique, internal possession and no one else’s. In this case, it becomes something that one identifies with and clings to as a permanent possession. Anything that threatens or interrupts this attachment threatens one’s being, thereby becoming a source of pain and suffering. It is impossible to ward off or prevent every and all threats to one’s continued being. Hence, the only solution to the persistent problem associated with clinging to a permanent identity is to give up the belief of an enduring, permanent self. This is what dependent arising implies.

⁴ See, for example, “Discourse to Kaccayana,” *EBD*, 83.

A Summary of Dependent Arising

The steps in the cycle of dependent arising as described in “The Greater Discourse on Cause,” verse 3 (*EBD*, 29) are as follows: psycho-physicality→consciousness→psycho-physicality→contact→feeling→craving→attachment→becoming→birth→aging and death. Two things must be mentioned here. First, it is not immediately clear which cause should come first between psycho-physicality and consciousness. In other texts “ignorance” is the first thing to be discussed, so that on one end of the discussion is ignorance and on the other is suffering, as if to imply that the former leads to the latter. Here, in “The Greater Discourse on Cause” the text varies slightly, omitting ignorance as the first step. “Dependent on psycho-physicality, there is consciousness, and dependent on consciousness there is psycho-physicality” (*Early Buddhist Discourses*, 29).⁵ In other words, they are co-conditional. Whereas there appears to be directionality in the other members of the cycle, this is not the case here. For example, one might say that psycho-physicality implies consciousness and consciousness implies psycho-physicality. However, one cannot say that of psycho-physicality and feeling. Psycho-physicality is the condition for feeling, but not vice versa. In this sense, the pair psycho-physicality and consciousness are unique, but, in order to explain the full cycle of conditions, consciousness must precede psycho-physicality, since only the latter precedes the next condition, which is feeling.

Second, one cannot speak of a first cause in any absolute sense, otherwise there would have to be a first uncaused cause, which, in principle, denies the very notion of dependent arising, where every step is co-dependent with every other step. The absence of an absolute first cause is useful in allowing us to avoid the problem of answering why we start with consciousness and not, say, becoming or birth. Since it is a repeating cycle, it doesn’t seem to matter where one begins. The progression is a description of the cycle of *samsara*. From any place in the cycle one is led both forwards and backwards, that is, each step is the condition for the next, and the existence of the next

implies the former as necessary condition. So, while the order is fixed, there is no beginning or end. However, since the principal focus is suffering, which is referred to as “aging and death,” one can say that dependent arising describes a causal sequence leading to suffering.

The teaching of dependent arising purports to explain the very nature of existence as constant change, although, in fact, what is being explained is a set of relations. Everything that exists is somehow related to, dependent on, and responsible for everything else. While there is no exact analogue to the western notion of “nature” as *phusis*, the doctrine of dependent arising might be viewed as an account of natural causality. Elsewhere the Buddha speaks of existence as some combination of the five aggregates: material form (*rupa*), feeling (*vedana*), perception (*sanna*), mental formations (*sankhara*), and consciousness (*vinnana*).⁶ According to this teaching there is no essential difference between living and non-living things. There is no creation, no first cause and no non-material being. Everything that comes to be is dependent on the material conditions that precede it. For example, consciousness is necessary for psycho-physicality. There is no real explanation for how or why consciousness or psycho-physicality arise. Consciousness needs a physical host as a kind of housing, specifically the womb of the mother. The Buddha explains, “And this is the way that it should be understood that consciousness is dependent on psycho-physicality. If consciousness did not find a resting place in psycho-physicality, would there subsequently be an arising and a coming to be of birth, aging, death, and suffering?” (*EBD*, 34). The kind of host required is somewhat vague. Presumably, all existing things are constituted by the five aggregates, which means that there is a component of consciousness in both animate and inanimate beings. Still, the emphasis on the doctrine seems very much to be on human existence, although we can infer that the doctrine can equally apply to animals and, possibly, plants. Nevertheless, the entire *sutta* on cause concerns itself exclusively with humans and the problem of overcoming human suffering, so the relation to animals and plants is tangential at best.

⁵ In the Maurice Walshe translation of this *sutta* in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1987), he renders psycho-physicality (*nama-rupa* in Pali) as “mind and body.”

⁶ See, for example, “A Discourse to the First Five Disciples,” *EBD*, 83.

As mentioned earlier consciousness and psycho-physicality are co-dependent. Without consciousness, there would be no psycho-physicality (see *EBD*, 34, verse 21). Whatever the “psycho” part of psycho-physicality means, it lacks the power to be the engine of life, since it depends on consciousness for its existence. Consciousness seems to be related to psycho-physicality in the same way that body is related to soul in western accounts, as both a kind of animating principle and the ground of mental activity, and yet it is not different in kind from what it conditions, since it arises from psycho-physicality. Hence, there is no appeal to a transcendent or super-natural origin for consciousness.

Psycho-physicality becomes the condition for contact, which must mean more than merely physical touching. There must be some kind of mental apparatus to receive the sensation from the physical touch. And yet contact is the condition for feeling, which results from the various types of contact, such as eye-contact, ear-contact, etc. (*EBD*, 33). Sensation captures the very sense of feeling. If feeling depends not only on the physical touch, but the mental reception of the data resulting from that touch, why does the Buddha distinguish consciousness from the “mind” part of psycho-physicality? Why not simply say that mind is the condition for body, body the condition for contact and contact the condition for feeling? My guess is that the Buddha regards consciousness as having a different function from mind. The former has to do with thought and awareness whereas the latter is more closely connected to sensation. In fact, it is enumerated along with the other five senses as a sixth sense.⁷

Once feeling arises from contact, the result must be either pleasant or unpleasant or neither pleasant nor unpleasant. The implication is that we crave pleasant feelings and thereby we pursue them. So, feeling becomes the condition that leads to craving or desire. Here the Buddhist teaching takes a crucial turn. Craving leads to attachment (*tanha*), which is the second noble truth. While there are still intervening steps in the cycle of dependent arising between attachment and suffering, attachment emerges as the principal cause of suffering.

⁷ See for example “The Greater Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness,” *EBD*, 50.

Here, the material nature of this doctrine becomes more evident. Attachments arise mechanically from craving. One doesn't work to form attachments any more than one has to work to breathe or sleep. They simply arise from the conditions that precede them. If attachments arise simply, we become, in a manner of speaking, the thing to which we become attached. Or perhaps it would be better to say that we become the kind of being that is composed of certain kinds of attachments. We *become* attached to certain desires, thoughts, activities – indeed, we *become* attached to existing. In the Buddha's sequence, then, becoming is conditioned by attachment and follows it in the order of dependent arising.

The next step in the doctrine of conditioned arising is rather strange. Becoming is the condition for birth. At first blush this seems backwards. Birth would seem to be the pre-eminent condition for any further state of existence. And yet the Buddha has it otherwise – birth depends on becoming. In order to make sense of this sequence one must have recourse to some notion of rebirth. The stream of existence produces a flow of aggregates that arise in a variety of temporal forms. One such form is the birth of a being, which certainly does not come from nothing, nor does it occur by means of any supernatural agency. Hence, birth, like any other phenomenon, depends on some pre-existing set of conditions, which is precisely what is called "becoming." The stream of becoming is nothing other than the changing current of the five aggregates.

Birth is one step away from the final step of aging and death, whose explanation seems somewhat tautological: if there were no birth, there would be no aging and death (*EBD*, 29-30). This is obviously true of any being. If there were no birth of a tree, there would be no subsequent aging and death. Yet the aging and death of a tree do not summon up suffering, whereas in the Buddha's account "sorrow, lamentation, pain, despair, and distress" are implicit in aging and death (*EBD*, 29). Such a discrepancy makes one wonder whether the doctrine of dependent origination is intended to be applied as universally as is claimed in the *suttas*. The same concern applies equally to the first noble truth. In other words, while both claim to explain existence in general, their relevance applies uniquely to human existence.

One is reminded here of certain Greek tragedies, *Oedipus at Colonnus* comes to mind, which teach that life is suffering, so the best thing is never to be born and the next best is to die young. Somehow, the Buddha does not appear to be responding to suffering in the same way. The best thing is to overcome the cycle of birth and re-birth, described by the causal cycle of dependent arising, because that cycle inevitably leads to suffering. His teaching promises liberation from the cycle and, thereby from suffering. Despite the foundational claim about suffering, the Buddha does not have a tragic view of life.

A Response to Dependent Origination

In the *Sutta* from which my analysis is taken, the doctrine in question is translated as “dependent arising.”⁸ The crucial word in the title of the *sutta* is “cause” which is rendered by the Pali word *nidana*. The prefix *maha* simply means “great.” The Pali-English On-line Dictionary of the Pali Text Society translates *nidana* as: (n.) tying down to; ground (lit. or fig.), foundation, occasion; source, origin, cause; reason, reference, subject. One of the problems in interpretation has to do with the difference in meaning among the terms *ground*, *origin*, and *cause*. Since the translator employs the word *cause*, I will address the problem with the use of that word. In what sense is each step in the cycle a cause? Let “A” and “B” stand for any successive steps in the cycle of dependent arising summarized above. The text claims that step B is dependent on step A and that A is the condition for B. Does this mean that A is a cause of B? Normally, when one says that A causes B, one can either mean that A is a necessary cause or a sufficient cause. Furthermore, one can mean that A is a proximate or a remote cause. Since for every step in the cycle, the immediately succeeding step is said to depend on the immediately preceding step, we can say that A is a proximate cause of B. Furthermore, since B is said to depend on A, A can be said to be necessary for B. However, the fact that B may depend on A does not imply that “If A, then B,” which is to say, “Whenever A, then B,” but rather “If B, then A,” which is to say “Whenever B, it must be immediately preceded by A. Hence, A is not a sufficient cause of B, but a necessary cause.

This means that A is one of the conditions that is sufficient to bring about B. Yet, it doesn't say anything about the other host of conditions that might also be necessary in order to be a sufficient cause. To designate such a set of conditions would be impossible, but if the teaching of dependent arising limits itself to naming the necessary condition without identifying the sufficient conditions, how can we be sure that we have identified the most important of the necessary conditions?

On the other hand, this whole objection may be missing the point if, indeed, the point of the doctrine is not to explain causality as such, but to simply identify relationships of dependence and a string of necessary causes. Yet, the whole teaching of dependent arising combined with that of the five aggregates seems to be as close as we come to a Buddhist doctrine of causality. Since we have the explicit denial of anything permanent or enduring, as in a self or soul, it is difficult to resist regarding it as a kind of materialist account, not much different, in principle, from atomism. The consciousness that combines with the other four aggregates to make up that temporary heap called a person disintegrates and loses even its temporary identity at death, unless we embrace the teaching of rebirth and insist that there might be some remote causal link between the five aggregates here and now and another five aggregates at another time. This coheres with the teaching about various kinds of rebirth, such as "stream-winner" or "once-returner," but all of this only complicates the matter of liberation from the cycle of dependent arising insofar as it would be impossible to say who or what is liberated.

The idea that the actions in one life affect the terms of rebirth and either impede or accelerate liberation invites the thought that we have some control over our futures. In short, it implies that we have free will. So, despite the cycle of conditioned arising, which limits the conditions that lead from suffering to ultimate cessation of suffering, there is some degree of volitional choice that becomes part of the limiting conditions and contributes to the stream of change. Thus, one sees that there is great emphasis on acting virtuously with loving kindness and compassion, but without attachment, lest we betray the idea that there is no permanent self. On the other hand, the crucial step in the cycle of dependent arising, the step from craving to attachment, does not appear to leave

⁸ Various translated as "dependent origination," "co-dependent arising."

much room for freedom of will. Consequently, one does not seem to have any choice but to be the victim of a world of suffering.

There are, of course, other materialist accounts that do not make suffering the paramount fact of existence. Democritean atomism, Epicureanism, and modern physicalism are a few examples of materialist accounts that do not insist on suffering as a first principle. Where do they part company with early Buddhism? It seems to me that the move from craving to attachment as a necessary consequence of the cycle of change is where Buddhism locks itself into the first noble truth. Were one to insist on a more robust account of free will, one could then argue against that step. Suppose, at this point, one objects that one can overcome attachment by means of volitional self-control? If attachment is the lynchpin of the doctrine, why not pull the pin by advocating a method of controlling desire and consequently avoiding attachment? That would appear to isolate attachment from the rest of the cycle of dependent origination and concede control to human volition. One might well object that to crave something is not to desire it forever and always. Indeed, cannot one moderate craving to the point that one craves what is needed and not more? If so, that would appear to alter the move from attachment to becoming and, ultimately, undermine the entire doctrine or, at least, the inevitable fact of suffering.

From yet another perspective it is curious that the doctrine of dependent origination would serve as the path to the cessation of suffering. The teaching of “no-self” is necessary for the understanding of dependent arising as the means to cessation of suffering. Despite the fact that the intention of the teaching is liberation from suffering, there is a frightening aspect to it. In the “Discourse on the Parable of the Water Snake” a *bhikku* asks the Buddha, “But, sir, could there be anxiety about something that is non-existent internally?” (*EBD*, 110). The questioner worries about ultimate annihilation and non-existence and anticipates grief on account of such a belief. One might well think that belief in some eternal entity such as god or the soul would serve as the eternal refuge of transient human life, where one transcends the pain of mortal existence. The Buddhist doctrine explicitly denies any permanent, enduring self or transcendent being and offers as the

means of salvation the belief in our being a part of a cycle of constantly changing conditions such that the idea of permanence is permanently rejected.

Still, one might wonder how the doctrine of dependent arising can assuage such concerns and how and why belief in permanent transience satisfies the quest to overcome suffering permanently. In reply to the worried *bhikku* mentioned above,⁹ the Buddha argues that if one begins by believing in something existing internally, something like a permanent self, then learning of the Buddha's teaching of "no-self" would indeed be frightening, since what one believed in is now said to completely disappear at death. However, if one starts with the belief that there is nothing existing internally, then one has nothing to fear from death, for it is merely another state of change, not unlike the one before death.

In the final analysis, the Buddha has made a strong case for the powerful pull of attachment (*tanha*) and its inevitable termination in suffering. However, whether the complete doctrine of dependent arising and its corollary teaching of "no-self" serve as an anodyne against the thought of permanent extinction remains a problem.

⁹ *EBD*, 110ff.

A Brief Reflection on Kamo No Chomei's *The Ten Foot Square Hut*

Kamo No Chomei's essay "the Ten-Foot-Square Hit" recounts the author's decision to renounce the secular world and seek to live his final days in a small hut in the mountains. The decision to make this move appears to be the result of certain experiences in his life that collectively bring him to an understanding about the inevitability of change and impermanence and the futility of human striving against these ineluctable forces. According to the brief introductory remarks to *The Ten Foot Square Hut*, Kamo No Chomei was disappointed at not being able to succeed his father as a priest at the Kamo Shrine in Kyoto upon the death of his father, when Chomei was in his twenties, even though the position had been hereditary in his family. No explanation is given for why Chomei was deprived of this position, but consequently he devoted himself to music, poetry, and he eventually became a Buddhist monk. This tiny bit of biographical information helps to identify Chomei as living at the confluence of mystical Shintoism, Pure Land Buddhism, and the elevated and highly refined art of Japanese music and poetry. This is not an uncommon blend for someone living in 12th century Japan, but it contributes to an understanding of his renunciation of the secular life. Additional biographical facts also help. He lived through the turbulent wars between the Heike and the Minamoto, which included the temporary move of the capital, and ended in the annihilation of the Heike. He witnessed and survived four devastating natural disasters, including fire, gales, drought, and earthquakes in the period of only eight years. One might well assume that his decision to remove himself from the secular world is a kind of escapism, perhaps aimed at survival, and yet from the remarks at the end of his essay, his removal seems more of an awakening.

Like the central theme of *The Tale of Genji*, *The Tale of the Heike*, and the *Pillow Book*, Chomei begins his brief essay with a reflection on the impermanence of things. He claims to be

writing this some forty years after having achieved the “age of understanding” (p. 48).¹ He discusses five events, which presumably contribute to the achievement of his “understanding”, - the moving of the capital and the four natural disasters. It seems warranted to view the experiences of these five events as the catalyst for his insight about the impermanence of things.

Of the four natural disasters that he recounts, each relating to one of the four elementary states - fire, air, water, and earth - he first mentions the fire that occurred when he was about 23 years old. He attributes the cause of the fire to human negligence, but anyone living near fire-prone areas knows that large-scale fires can just as easily be caused by non-human natural events, such as lightning. Even so the implication is that the consequences of certain kinds of human activity, in this case dancers living in a makeshift shelter (p. 49), are just as unpredictable and can be just as destructive as natural disasters. Besides witnessing the devastation to property and to lives, he concludes that nothing could be more foolish than to build one's house in the capital, presumably because of the ever-present threat of accidental fire. One observes that his final comment on the first disaster has mostly to do with destruction to property.

He next comments on the whirlwind that occurs about three years after the fire describing whole city blocks having their buildings flattened while gates and fences were ripped from their foundations and blown away, demonstrating not only the power of nature, but the relative weakness of human means to oppose it.

The third event is the moving of the capital, which occurred in the same year as the whirlwind. The capital, as the center of government activity, also provides employment for everyone connected to government. One assumes that the majority of non-agricultural workers, namely city dwellers, depend on the government for employment. Therefore, anyone already connected to or aspiring towards government employment was compelled to move to the new location, presumably at considerable personal expense. All property left behind suddenly became next to worthless. “[T]he old capital had been laid waste, while the new one was yet to be completed” (p. 54).

¹ All page references will be to *Four Huts: Asian Writings on the Simple Life*, tr. by Burton Watson (Boston: Shambala Publications), 1994

Interestingly, the only people unaffected were those already disenfranchised to some extent, who did not rely on the government for employment. "Only those who had missed their chance, who had been shunted aside by the world and had no prospects for advancement, remained behind, brooding on their fate" (p. 53). Chomei points out that the decision to move the capital back to the original location, the one that had existed for over four hundred years, was made less than a year after the original move, causing even more havoc and dislocation, not to mention economic hardship, since new houses would have to be built yet again. He reminisces about the ancient sage emperors, who ruled with compassion, living in a modest style more closely connected to the common people, so as not to create economic hardship. While not a natural disaster, the consequences of the move of the capital were similar to those of the natural ones being narrated. Chomei takes the ill-conceived move to be a portent of a kind of deterioration in leadership, whose effect is to render the lives of those ruled to be victims of unpredictable change. "People all felt themselves to be mere drifting clouds" (p. 54). One infers that during this time period in Japanese history a considerable gulf existed between rich and poor, as represented by those connected to governing and those engaged in some form of manual labor.

Water, or rather its lack, figures into the next large-scale disaster. A two-year drought occurred approximately one year after the move of the capital. The effects of the drought were not localized as in the cases of the fire and whirlwind, because, as he tells us, "[i]t was customary for the capital to depend on the countryside for all its needs" (p. 56). Money lost its currency and the only thing of value became what was edible. The consequence of this was a leveling of social standing. The formerly wealthy went begging for food while starvation spread from the capital to the countryside, leading some people to seek refuge in the mountains where they might live on berries and nuts. Ultimately the rich perished alongside the poor and the normal fabric of social life was in tatters insofar as wealth and class structure were rendered meaningless. People even desecrated Buddhist temples in quest of firewood. Among the more touching observations was the self sacrifice that husbands and wives made for each other, as did parents for children, each giving

to the other what little food could be had. Chomei, an eyewitness to the massive starvation, calls the loss of life “almost limitless” (p. 60).

The final nail in the coffin, so to speak, was the great earthquake, which occurred a mere three years after the two-year drought. Having witnessed the three previous natural disasters, one is moved to hear Chomei claim that “among all the frightening things, there is none more frightening than an earthquake” (p. 61). The earth is our home, the ultimate ground of our stability and surefootedness, our place of apparent safety. When it no longer provides a haven and itself becomes a danger to living, one might well despair or seek refuge in the supernatural, only this earthquake tumbled temples as well as houses making the gods themselves appear powerless.

Chomei does not dwell on the unpredictability of the future and the vicissitudes of fortune as if some deficiency in human understanding was the ultimate cause, which could be corrected by means of knowledge. The true state of affairs is impermanence and one must assume that it is only having truly achieved this realization that enables one to live in peace. In recounting the five events that led to his removal from the secular world, he never fails to mention the destruction of property, specifically dwellings, alongside of the loss of life. For most people they go together. He concludes from his earlier life, “the world as a whole is a hard place to live in, and both we and our dwellings are precarious and uncertain things” (p. 62). The “we and our dwellings” is significant. As long as we live, our reaching out for life must accompany us. Our dwellings, on the other hand, need not be extravagant or luxurious. In commenting on the difficulties of life, Chomei suggests that the rich are no better off than the poor. The rich inevitably incur the jealousy of the poor, which causes them fear. Conversely, the poor suffer shame and discontent being constantly reminded of their lack by the lifestyle of the rich. Neither finds peace. Furthermore, dependency on or by others further encumbers us. The solution to this perennial human problem seems recondite.

The solution that presents itself to Chomei, who seeks salvation from the world of impermanence, is to overcome the problem of “we and our dwellings.” He eventually leaves the secular world at the age of fifty for the mountains, away from the life of the capital and economic

dependence. He remains unattached, without wife or children and, presumably, without friends. As to dwellings, he downsizes two times from the house inherited from his grandmother and by the time he is sixty he lives in his ten-foot square hut, less than one-hundredth the size of his original house.

One question that naturally arises is why he seeks refuge in the mountains. Given the context that led to his move, the suggestion seems to be that, in some sense, the city is dead or dying, while the mountains are eminently alive and offer a path to renewal. The simpler answer seems to be that the mountains provide all that is needed for living simply. Wood from trees and forest vegetation provide the means for a dwelling as well as an unlimited supply of firewood as fuel for heat. Water is readily accessible. Since one has no need of others, one can live in solitude, completely independently. This, of course, invites the question of why is such a life desirable, or, for that matter, lacking human interaction, more desirable than life in the capital. In fact, despite his best efforts at renunciation, he wonders about his situation so as to leave open the question of whether he has found his ultimate peace.

Before considering whether he has accomplished his goal, let's consider what he has achieved. He treats his hut as something temporary, "like a traveler who prepares shelter for one night" (p. 66). It is easily disassembled and relocated if the necessity arises. His dwelling is unlike any others described earlier, in the sense that it is virtually unaffected by a recurrence of the events described earlier. If it burns down or blows away or tumbles in an earthquake, it can easily be rebuilt. If water becomes scarce, he can move it closer to another source. There is no dependence on external economic support to cause him to move it. His possessions are few even if he allows for a few books and musical instruments. Hearing from time to time of news from the capital and the recurrence of lost lives and houses destroyed by fire, he remarks, "only this dwelling of mine has remained tranquil and safe from harm" (p. 70).

Chomei practices Buddhism when he feels like it and when he is no longer in the mood, he desists, with no one to cause him shame by accusing him of neglect. Likewise, with no one to talk to, there is no way to commit offences against the Buddhist law. He is free to write poetry, or play

music without regard for being judged by others, since he does so only for his own amusement. He hikes in the woods, observes the boats at the nearby shore and, when in need of human company, finds companionship in the ten year old son of the mountain caretaker, about whom he says, "we seem to enjoy the same sort of things" (p. 70).

Are we to suppose that a man of sixty and a boy of ten can truly be friends? Of course, that may be asking a question that presumes too much. Friendship is a kind of emotional and intellectual attachment to another. Chomei renounced human attachment when he realized that both love and obligation infringe on one's freedom. He, by contrast, believes that he has achieved complete freedom. The relationship with the boy is never said to be a friendship, but merely a mutual enjoyment. Perhaps this is too disingenuous. Chomei confesses to "thinking of old friends" on occasion, but does not claim to have a longing for them. The mere memory suffices. Perhaps one can have the fruits of a kind of primitive fellowship, as he has with the boy, without the bonds that lead to any kind of dependence. Chomei claims to have made companions out of the "buried embers of the fire" or "the voice of the owl" (p. 71).

One cannot help but wonder why, in renouncing friendship, he limits himself to considering only the kind of friendship that is inferior.

In choosing friends, people look first of all for someone who is rich and can benefit them; they don't necessarily care of the person is upright or genuine in feeling. Better to have no friends but musical instruments and the beauties of nature" (p. 73).

Why doesn't he propose a higher kind of friendship? Isn't there some kind of middle ground between what is rejected above, namely a relationship of exploitation, and the companionship of a ten year old? It is curious that Chomei prefers solitary living to a life that includes the company of real friends. Perhaps it has something to do with achieving religious salvation according to his Buddhist beliefs. One who seeks detachment must ultimately detach even from human association, at least insofar as there may be a danger of clinging to the person. One assumes that true friendship cannot co-exist with one who has completely detached.

In one way, then, he appears to be the model of one who has achieved self-knowledge.

Knowing my own size and knowing the ways of the world, I crave nothing, chase about after nothing. I desire only a peaceful spot, and delight in being free from care. (p. 72)

One hears echoes of the Delphic injunction "Know Thyself", the Stoic belief in accommodating oneself to what one cannot change, and the Epicurean quest for "tranquility of mind." And yet none of these philosophies of living proposed a life of pure, self imposed solitude. Lest one forget, Chomei does not cultivate this life until he is older than fifty, the time in life when most of his contemporaries are giving thought to final things. So, one is left to consider whether the simple pleasures of his natural surrounding are adequate compensation for the absence of friendship.

Ironically, the beauty and simplicity that he cultivates turn against him and become, at least in his own mind, an impediment to his salvation. According to the Buddha, one must renounce worldly attachment to get beyond the world of *samsara*. Likewise, from the beginning, Chomei has warned of the blandishments of possessions, especially as invested in one's dwelling. The logical path would be to embrace the simple life and learn to appreciate the "delights of the quiet life" (p. 75), although they need to be experienced in order to be appreciated. "Without living such a life, how can one comprehend them?" (p. 75). In Chomei's case, he appears to have accomplished this with his ten-foot square hut. Yet, he has grown to love the very thing that served as the path of overcoming his secular life.

The teachings of the Buddha warn us against feelings of attachment. So now it must be wrong for me to love this thatched hut of mine, and my fondness for quiet and solitude must be a block to my salvation. Why have I wasted precious time in the recital of these useless pleasures? (p. 75)

He cannot reconcile his failure to achieve complete detachment from the world and his attachment to his simplistic world of self-imposed solitude.

Just as Nagajuna introduces the perplexing idea of "the emptiness of emptiness", so as not to treat "emptiness" as a fixed or enduring state of being, perhaps we could consider the "detachment of detachment" as a way of approaching Chomei's dilemma.² There is a level of

² Forgive me if I seem to be indulging in doubletalk when attempting to explain these arcane Buddhist texts. It seems to go with the territory.

detachment that one experiences when relinquishing all claims to worldly goods. And yet “all claims”, if taken to the extreme, would include food, clothing, shelter – in short, the means to mere subsistence. Surely, this cannot be what the Buddha means when he exhorts us to achieve detachment. Chomei comes as close as one can come in a human life, short of withering away by means of starvation or bodily neglect, which would violate the Buddha’s exhortation to seek the middle way. When Chomei relates the things that give him pleasure, they are not material things or things that can be accumulated. He is detached to the extent that there is nothing to which he clings. Rather, they are the vanishing beauties of nature. And yet, even if vanishing, they abound so that “[E]ach season in the mountain brings an endless succession of sights” (p. 71). As long as one is alive, one encounters the world through one’s senses. Can one be alive while dead to one’s senses? If not, can one resist the simple pleasures afforded by nature? But, again, if not, can one indulge oneself in these simple pleasures without corrupting one’s pursuit of detachment? Chomei manages the balance between the life of detachment from worldly attachments while detaching himself from “pure detachment”, so that he is still alive to the beauty and simplicity of nature, which is no longer an impediment to his Buddhist goals.

Chomei’s further reflection on this problem reduces him to silence (see last sentence of his essay) as if, despite the delights in his day-to-day living, his life is in some sense a failure, since he has not entirely entered the “Buddha-field.” Or perhaps his silence betrays a hint of rebelliousness. That is, as an aspiring Buddha, he doesn’t want to denounce the life outlined by THE Buddha, but I feel a strong temptation to see his achievement as the ultimate practice of the middle way. His joy in the simple life is not a joy of attachment in the conventional sense. In fact, he is following many of the Buddha’s recommendations about how to reduce attachments. He has achieved a blend of the three factors that I alluded to at the beginning, namely mystical Shintoism, Pure Land Buddhism, and a highly elevated sense of Japanese music and poetry. His response to the disasters of his earlier years in the capital issues from an acceptance of the mysteries of nature, perhaps occasioned by the inscrutable ways of Shinto deities. He makes no attempt to placate or

appease them. Rather, he accepts things as they are and adjusts his life accordingly. The quest for simplicity manifest in his move to the ten-foot square hut in the mountains reflects his desire for salvation according to the Buddhist teachings about non-attachment. He continues his prayers to Amida Buddha and maintains a small Buddhist shrine with a copy of the *Lotus Sutra* ready to hand. He writes poetry, plays music, and continues to delight in his natural surroundings, so that he is appreciating moments of beauty, but without attachment. He maintains equanimity in the face of their evanescence.

We recall that Chomei's move from the capital to the mountains and his final days in his ten-foot square hut initially grew out of an awareness of the unpredictability of change and the impermanence of all things in this world. His early experiences in the capital taught him that. The Buddha insists on non-attachment as a means of overcoming impermanence, because that leads to overcoming suffering, which inevitably arises from attachment to the temporal and impermanent. Yet Chomei does delight in his simple existence, so that when he expresses an inner concern that his modest delights might betray the quest for ultimate detachment, he simultaneously claims to have found the peace and tranquility that eluded him earlier in life. If one truly finds peace in this world, why can't one thereby say that one dwells in the Pure Land?

The Unusual Language of Chuang-Tzu

Pre-Han China, especially the time referred to as the warring states period (403-221 B.C.E.), is plagued by the ambitions of feudal lords, who seek hegemony over neighboring states and, in their selfish quest for gain, bring about a period of conflict, hardship, and penury for most of the commoners. Competing schools of philosophical thought emerge during this time, which influence the political and military affairs, as various emperors, dukes, and feudal lords seek advice from prominent thinkers. Among these are Confucius, Mencius, Mo-tzu, Hsun-tzu and Han Fei-tzu, whose competing views are unified by one thing – the importance they place on restoring or emulating the rule of virtue as practiced by ancient (probably legendary) rulers of the earliest dynasties, the Xia, Shang, and Chou. Confucius and his followers make filial piety of central importance, while Mo-tzu teaches universal love, Hsun-tzu urges personal responsibility and determined effort towards learning, and Han Fei-tzu represents the school of Legalism. Yet, for all of their differences, they share an exclusive concern with temporal rule, life on earth, and the establishment of social order. Out of this marketplace of moral and political teachings emerges a philosophical vocabulary with terms like filial piety, benevolence, ritual propriety, cultural refinement, gentleman, man of breeding, and sage, which collectively define the central concerns of the authors.

Chuang-tzu stands out among his philosophical contemporaries, not as someone who disagrees about the meaning of human conduct and statecraft, the pervasive theme of so many of the classical Chinese texts, but as someone who redefines the terms of philosophical discourse. It's as if his concerns transcend the political and moral and focus on man adrift in the universe. Far from emphasizing benevolence or ritual piety, one encounters words like "roaming" or "rambling," "useless," "daemonic," "stillness," and "spontaneity." The ideas suggested by such words, at least on the surface, turn us away from man's social and political connections, put aside moral doctrines, and approach life on earth as a part of a ceaseless cycle of transformations and changes. Man is nothing special in the world of beings. In fact, those who teach that man has a special place of significance lead us away from that one true path of all life – the Tao.

Chuang-tzu subtly denounces the Confucians, Mohist, Yangists, and Legalists without engaging in polemics. He is not an iconoclast. Rather he offers a philosophical alternative that stands in opposition to all the preceding traditions. Chuang-tzu soars above ethics, politics, and societal standards in his writing and, in so doing, invites us to enter a new and somewhat mystical realm of thought detached from the traditional concerns of his philosophical rivals. In some ways

he in enchanting, in other ways he is disturbingly frustrating, not because what he writes is so opaque, but rather because what he aims at is so nebulous.

It is interesting that Chuang-tzu comes to be associated with the group specifically known as "Taoists." Virtually, every thinker since Confucius speaks of the Tao as the governing principle of the universe. In that sense they are all Taoists. What distinguishes one group of thinkers from another is the way in which they understand the Tao and its influence on human life. To try to define what the Tao means in Taoism is beyond the scope of what I hope to accomplish, not to mention that it runs afoul of the injunctions against trying to reduce it to verbal expression. Still, one gets something of a flavor of what each group of thinkers understands by "the Tao" by means of the language that they use in their writings. In this paper, then, I want to look at Chuang-tzu's unusual language, especially in the early part of the inner chapters by focusing on a few of the idiosyncratic words that identify him and show how he radically transforms the philosophical discourse of his time. Specifically, I will discuss "roaming," or "rambling," which I take to mean essentially the same thing, and the related term "useless."¹

Insofar as the majority of the early Chinese thinkers take moral and political thought as their principal focus, one may infer that they agree that man's nature is fundamentally political or social, a point virtually ignored by Chuang-tzu. His focus, on the contrary, transcends the temporal in order to see the unity and sameness in all things. Does this mean that Chuang-tzu denies man's political nature? Does he deny that man has an essential nature? To speak of an essential nature is to name something that remains the same throughout all change. Chuang-tzu takes as the fundamental fact of life continuing transformations. The goal is not to identify our essential nature and then identify those activities that satisfy, if not perfect it, since the very nature of transformations precludes perfection in the ordinary sense. To speak of a starting point and ending point for Chuang-tzu implies a definable sense of human nature that indicates the kinds of activity appropriate to us and a goal to which our activities ought to be directed. This is out of step with his teaching. There is nothing that one can claim to be essentially man and no end or purpose to which human life inevitably aims. There is no "that's it" or "that's not it" regarding the best human life. To attempt to define a "best" would fall into the trap of defining a "that's it" and thereby violate a

¹ I limit the discussion of these terms to the inner chapters, even though there are references in the outer chapters. Also, I take the Graham translation as the primary source owing to the greater consistency in translation. Generally, the terms "roaming" or "rambling" are used interchangeably by Graham. There are at least thirteen occurrences of the words roaming or rambling, or some form of them, within the inner chapters as translated by Graham (pages 47, 59, 69, 71, 77, 78, 78, 82, 86, 89, 95, 96, and 98 twice). While Graham is more consistent in his usage, Palmer, by contrast, translates each of those passages differently except in three instances, page 6 (corresponding to 47 in Graham), page 55 (corresponding to 89 in Graham), and page 62 (corresponding to 96 in Graham) where he translates the same word as "wander," as in the title of the first chapter, "Wandering Where You Will."

fundamental injunction. On the other hand, one cannot escape the fact that there is a teaching of sorts. Central to this teaching is the claim that all things are in a process of ceaseless transformations. Boundaries are illusory, names are mere conveniences, and the more that one is open to this way of things, the closer one gets to the Tao. In light of this realization one defining activity, which accords with the teaching, is roaming or rambling.

The Taoist Cowboy: "Going rambling without a destination"

There is something so appealing to the idea of roaming free. Like the hero of Edward Abbey's *The Brave Cowboy*,² Jack Burns, a free-spirited cowpuncher, who, in refusing to accommodate the intrusions of rules, regulations, and conformity imposed by the modern world, evinces a spirit of uncompromising dedication to life without boundaries. In fact this is emblematic of the archetypical cowboy ethos, which is contained in the lyrics of an old Cole Porter song:

Oh, give me land, lots of land under starry skies above, Don't fence me in.
Let me ride through the wide open spaces that I love, Don't fence me in.
Let me be by myself in the evening breeze
And listen to the murmur of the cottonwood trees
Send me off forever but I ask you please, Don't fence me in.

The song speaks of wide-open spaces without boundaries - an interesting request given the fact that so much of cowboy life involves riding the range, herding cattle or horses, and putting up fence to separate one man's livestock from another's. There are boundaries on property and property sustains life, so it's important to differentiate mine and thine. Yet the author of the song wants to abolish fences. We can assume that what is appropriate for cattle is anathema to humans. According to the cowboy ethos, humans are by nature opposed to being fenced in, bounded, restrained, or restricted. On the other hand, those who keep cattle dwell on ranches, have families to help with the maintenance, and, importantly, maintain their fences. Families imply social connections, emotional attachments, and responsibility to others. Yet, the song says, "Let me be by myself" to which one might reply, "Well everyone needs solitude from time to time and a bit of distance from loved ones," but then we hear, "Send me off forever," as if to say permanent alienation from human society is preferable to being fenced in. Is such a life possible? It does require some amenity, such as the "evening breeze" and the "murmur of the cottonwood trees." These are images of communing with nature, but specifically non-human nature. Humans impose boundaries, nature doesn't, at least not artificial ones. Of course, nature imposes other kinds of

² This was made into a movie called "Lonely are the Brave," with Kirk Douglas as Jack Burns, also starring a very young Gena Rowlands and Walter Matthau. Very cool film!

boundaries, physical ones, like limits on human power and, ultimately, mortality. Can one escape these? This is a question to which I will return.

There is something in Chuang-tzu very much akin to the cowboy ethos mentioned above in his idea of “going rambling without a destination.” Rambling is non-preferential. It implies that one place is as good as another. There is no absolutely good place. Ultimately, it offers a perspective in which all things appear the same. This is not identical to the song above, which prefers wide open spaces and wind-swept trees. Presumably, the middle of a populous urban area would not do. Nevertheless, one infers that Chuang-tzu also prefers simplicity and the outdoors. Furthermore, Chuang-tzu asserts that the preferred kind of rambling is not to have a destination. Chapter One offers this viewpoint in the opening story of the fish named K’un who changes into a bird named P’eng. As the bird flies higher “everything below looks the same as above” (Graham, 43). Is the ultimate perspective to see things as undifferentiated? This is literally impossible. All seeing implies sameness and difference, hence in some sense differentiated. So, then, is the story a metaphor for taking the things that we see as fundamentally the same regardless of appearances? Or is it rather to acknowledge with modern relativity theory that everything depends on one’s frame of reference, without admitting any preferred or privileged perspective? Let’s consider further the opening story.

The story is an allegory, perhaps meant to explain the cases of the two named personages, Sung Jung and Lieh-tzu, whose story follows. They see themselves the way the cicada and the turtle dove saw themselves in relation to P’eng, the immeasurably big bird, who is flying 90,000 miles above the earth. The cicada and the turtle dove cannot fathom flying high, but only laugh when they think of how earthbound they are. “We keep flying till we’re bursting, stop when we get to an elm or sandalwood, and sometimes are dragged back to the ground before we’re there” (Graham, 44). Likewise, a quail, familiar only with his own limits and incapable of flying high, laughed at P’eng saying, “Where does he think he’s going? I do a hop and a skip and up I go, and before I’ve gone more than a few dozen yards come fluttering down among the bushes. That is the highest one can fly, where does he think he’s going?” (Graham, 44). We each see the achievements of others through the lens of our own limited horizons, thinking that the world must conform to our limited vision. We see *our* boundaries as *the* boundaries. What neither of the small birds understands is that even P’eng depends on the wind and the height that he is able to reach in order to soar to his destination. “If the mass of the wind is not bulky enough it lacks the strength to carry the great wings. So it is only when the bird is ninety thousand miles high, with the wind underneath it, that it rests its weight on the wind and it must have the blue sky on its back and a clear view ahead before it will set its course for the South” (Graham, 43). To become aware of one’s own dependencies and one’s own limitations ought to confer some advantage in getting

through life. One learns not to aim higher than is permitted by one's nature, and not to try to fly like a gigantic bird if nature hasn't bestowed wings.

The allegory of the birds explains the circumstances of Sung Jung and Lieh-tzu. The former has limited success in his own district, working for one prince and operating from his own limited horizon, "in the hope of bringing blessings to the world." "He was unwavering about the division between inward and outward, discriminating about the boundary between honour (sic) and disgrace – but then he soared no higher. (He was too concerned about the world to break clean away)" (Graham, 44). The latter journeyed on the wind for fifteen days but "still depended on something to carry his weight" (Graham, 44). Everything seems to be a matter of perspective. The small doesn't understand the perspective of the great and vice versa. The benevolent, like Sung Jung, doesn't understand the perspective of the selfish. One might think from this that each should live comfortably and contentedly within the limited horizons that he occupies.

Chuang-tzu teaches otherwise. He aims at the obliteration of all boundaries, because boundaries are illusions, invented as a way to give ourselves the pretension that we are operating within our own proper limits. The problem is that no one can judge accurately what the proper limits are, not because of a deficiency in us, but because they don't exist. Limits constantly shift.

What is It is also Other, what is Other is also It. There they say 'That's it, that's not' from one point of view, here we say 'That's it, that's not' from another point of view. Are there really It and Other? Or really no It and Other? Where neither It nor Other finds its opposite is called the axis of the Way. When once the axis is found at the centre of the circle there is no limit to responding with either, on the one hand no limit to what is *it*, on the other no limit to what is not. (Graham, 53)

The "axis" of the Way is that point where boundaries blur. What is taken for a 'this' is all the while transforming into a 'that' and the very moment when one attempts to name it, it's no longer the same. So, the human propensity for discriminating mentioned above is at odds with Chuang-tzu's insistence on the ceaseless transformations taking place in the world. There is no essential, unchanging core to things. The essential nature of everything is that it transforms. In light of this, the form of something is nothing more than a guise, a skin to be shed. Consider the following exchange between Chuang-tzu and Hui Shih.

'Can a man really be without the essentials of man?' 'He can.'
'If a man is without the essentials of man, how can we call him a man?'
'The Way gives him the guise, Heaven gives him the shape, how can we refuse to call him a man?'
'But since we do call him a man, how can he be without the essentials of man?'

‘Judging “That’s it, that’s not” is what I mean by the “essentials of man”. What I mean by being without the essentials is that the man does not inwardly wound his person by likes and dislikes, that he constantly goes by the spontaneous and does not add anything to the process of life.’ (Graham, 82)

Ordinarily, one would take the essence of something as that without which the thing would not be what it is. If one strips away wings and feathers from a flying creature, it is no longer a bird. In the quote above what is called “the essentials of man” means something like what is commonly or almost always the case with men, which keeps them from being something more in accord with the Tao. Taking *essence* as that property or collection of properties that makes something what it is, Chuang-tzu denies essentials altogether. The true nature of the Way is one of constant becoming, each being in the world becoming something else. “The reclining man here now is not the reclining man of yesterday” (Graham, 48). This is what Chuang-tzu refers to as “transformations.” If the Tao has the nature of being the way of transformations, then to attempt to hold onto a “this” or a “that” as an essential characteristic is futile. Rather, the Taoist insight demands spontaneity and openness. “He is without what is essentially man, and therefore ‘That’s it, that’s not’ are not found in his person” (Graham, 82). The sage lives in accord with heaven not earth, with the infinite rather than the finite, with the vast rather than the small. He is not deeply connected to any place nor to any time. He does not prefer to be in one place rather than another. He is like P’eng, the bird that soars 90,000 miles above the world having only the azure sky as its horizon.³

Hence, both Sung Jung and Lieh-tzu are compared, unfavorably, with “the man who rides a true course between heaven and earth, with the changes of the Six Energies for his chariot, to travel into the infinite, is there anything that he depends on?” (Graham, 44). One would have to link the true course between heaven and earth with rambling and soaring. Rambling suggests being unconnected, unbound, unattached to a particular horizon or frame of reference, like Sung Jung. Soaring suggests being dependent on the wind alone, as if free from the constraints of one’s body. The idea of being free from any perspective or any horizon is humanly impossible, but soaring implies having the broadest perspective, to see as far and wide as possible. This is why rambling is so important to Chuang-tzu.

³ One sees in the outer chapters several instances of what Palmer translates as “innate nature.” (See, for example, pages 70, 80, 97, 104, 108, 126, 134 162, 174, and 190). Correspondingly, Graham renders the phrase “nature which is constant” (204). These occurrences do not trouble my point here, since “innate nature” in all of these occurrences appears to mean nothing more than the primitive, instinctive response to external circumstances, which in Chuang-tzu’s account does not essentially distinguish humans from other living things.

Strangely, rambling does not imply leaving or returning. To leave is to be attached to a place and acknowledge it as a point of departure, perhaps as a place to return to. Chuang-tzu's idea of roaming is not like that of another great wanderer, Odysseus. By contrast Odysseus' wanderings are defined by his long awaited homecoming and reunion with wife and son. Odysseus has attachments, to family, to community, to land, even if he has a need for solitary wandering. His very leaving reinvigorates his primary connections and makes them the *terminus ad quem* of all of his adventures.

For Chuang-tzu there does not appear to be any social connection or identity with a community. Wandering, as in the case of Odysseus, implies a going towards someplace, possibly as a quest or a goal, but always with the expectation of a return. Rambling lacks attachment on both ends. One is neither attached to the point of origin nor to the terminus. There is no terminus. It is much like water. What determine the course of the flow are the external circumstances and the boundaries. But these two are in constant flux, so what was once a watercourse may now be a dry desert or vice versa. "That is why the sage does not take this course, but opens things up to the light of Heaven; his too is a 'That's it' which goes by circumstance" (Graham, 52).

Rambling is a metaphor for Chuang-tzu's entire teaching. In one way it seems like aimless activity, which must be regarded as useless. In another way it is the response to the fundamental nature of the way things are – endless transformations. With such a view there cannot be a terminus or teleological goal. Anything that one takes to be ultimate is, in time, transformed. Any expression of preferential goal is a betrayal of this fundamental truth. Hence, rambling is presented as the most reasonable response to the nature of things.

Like soaring rambling is to be above the fray. To think of it negatively, it is detached, insulated from the fickle and, often, dangerous ways of the world. It loses nothing insofar as it ventures nothing. On the positive side, roaming and rambling are paths to being open minded. One simply accepts the way things are and develops an attitude of openness. One is also indifferent in the sense that to express a preference would be to attach oneself to a definite perspective, a "this" or a "that." The danger is that when one discriminates two aspects of something, one invariably ignores a third thing. "To 'divide', then, is to leave something undivided: to 'discriminate between alternatives' is to leave something which is neither alternative" (Graham, 57). This is a concession to the limits of human perspective, where one is not entirely indifferent to changes in circumstance. When times are good, one thrives. When they are not good, one merely survives.

When the Empire has the Way
The Sage succeeds in it.
When the Empire lacks the Way
The sage survives in it.
In this time of ours, enough
If he dodges execution in it. (Graham, 75)

Presumably, the difference between success, survival, and dodging execution is not so significant. The most important thing seems to be to adapt to the unpredictable, uncontrollable external circumstances.

What, then, is the broadest perspective in Chuang-tzu's terms? Presumably it is being unattached, uninvolved, utterly free, unlimited by goals, impossible desires, or bodily limitations. But all humans have bodies, hence physical limitations. Many thinkers have sought liberation from the body in the next life or in thoughts of immortality. Chuang-tzu has no otherworldly aims. He is wholly directed at this life, but living in a way that assumes an unlimited perspective.

Oddly, there is not a single instance in the inner chapters of a character that "rambles without a destination." The closest example might be Uglyface T'o, who wanders away shortly after having been put in charge of state by Duke Ai (Graham, 79-80). Even the huge bird P'eng at the beginning of the book has a destination – the southern lake of heaven. Conversely, there are all sorts of stories about people seeking teaching from a Master, in other words, people with a clear purpose and a definite intention. This seems at odds with the exhortation to ramble or roam without a destination. One solution may be to understand the Tao as already having a destination, which is implied in our "innate nature", presumably bestowed by Heaven. To have a self-willed destination is to have replaced the open plan with a "this" or a "that" which is ultimately to pit human will against the will of heaven. To understand this better one must extract from the stories a kind of teaching, but one that accords with "the Tao that cannot be named." One might call it a teaching that is not a teaching or a goal that is not a goal. In Chuang-tzu's vocabulary the term that answers to this is "uselessness."

Tranquility and Uselessness

There is an old saying about the impotence of man's will in relation to God's, "Man proposes, God disposes." Or, to adapt another (trite, but illuminating) expression, "Heaven's way is what happens when we are busy making plans." In Chuang-tzu's world there are man's way, Heaven's way, and the Way itself. However, Heaven emerges as the source of man's destiny. Thus, the sage "opens things up to the light of Heaven" (Graham, 52). Assuming such a thing as Heaven's will or man's destiny, Chuang-tzu insists that they are unknowable. "It seems that there is something genuinely in command, and that the only trouble is we cannot find a sign of it" (Graham, 51). The episode in Chapter Seven involving the fortune-telling daemonic shaman, Chi Hsien, who flees in the end from an encounter with the sage Hu-tzu, casts profound suspicion on any claims about predicting the future. At the same time, Chuang-tzu warns against the evils of knowledge and good intentions lest we make 'pests' of ourselves. (See Graham, 67 top; cf. Palmer, 27, who renders becoming pests as "hurting others").

If heaven's ways are inscrutable and knowledge is an impediment to truly being in accord with The Way, ⁴ what ought one to do in life? Must we renounce any and all expectations and make no commitments to attempting to make things better? Does this lead to a life of total indifference to future prospects? Is there nothing to which one can look forward with an attitude of welcome? There is. Let's call it tranquility and stillness.

Transformation is the way of things. To abide in the transformations of things is the way of inner peace. True power is an internal discipline that focuses less on difference and distinction and requires that one become attuned to the oneness of things and accept their sameness.

"While ordinary people rush busily around, the sage seems stupid and ignorant, but to him all life is one and united. All life is simply what it is and all appear to him to be doing what they rightly should." (Palmer, 19).

"[I]f you look at them from the viewpoint of their sameness, the myriad of things are all one. Such a man cannot even tell apart the functions of eyes and ears, and lets the heart go roaming in the *peace* which is from the Power." (Graham, 77. emphasis mine).⁵

Peace, stillness, and tranquility are characteristics of the sage. One must withdraw, be passive, allow things to take their natural course, and not get caught up in the affairs of the world, which are complex, unpredictable, and frustrating. Intervention on behalf of a seemingly righteous cause is regarded as intrusive and pesky. Good intentions are no excuse. In keeping with this perspective one wonders whether the ultimate case of non-intervention is total withdrawal. Chuang-tzu does not insist that the sage is a hermit or recluse. In fact, he tells several stories about friends, even ones that look out for one another's welfare. Still, there is the troubling suggestion that with the passage of time, friends and family die, things continue to transform and one is left alone to confront the world. One might conclude that the sage is profoundly alone. "Unutterably vast, the Heaven within him which he perfects in solitude" (Graham, 82). In solitude one can more easily achieve stillness. Can one say the same about inner peace and tranquility? One might just as well say that solitude issues in claustrophobic anxiety and restless longing rather than peace of mind.

⁴ "... knowledge is a tool of competition" (Graham, 67); "... expel knowledge from the heart, the ghostly and daemonic will come to dwell in you ..." (Graham, 69); "Hence, wherever the sage roams, for him knowledge is a curse, ..." (Graham, 82). One worries with a text like Chuang-tzu's about amassing text to substantiate a point like the danger of knowledge, for there are just as many places where one reads about "the perfection of knowledge" and the proper use of it. This might lead one to want to comment on the use and abuse of knowledge according to Chuang-tzu, but that is not my purpose here, so I merely acknowledge the ambiguity.

⁵ As further support of my point, consider the following. "... as for recognizing the inescapable and being content with it as destined, only the man who does have Power in him is capable of that."

Non-disturbance is an intriguing human goal. One thinks of Epicurus who speaks in the "Letter to Menoeceus" of a blessed life as one that achieves freedom from the disturbance of the mind (*ataraxia*) as well as health of the body. While the former could easily accord with Chuang-tzu, he seems indifferent to the latter. In fact, one is startled at how many of his salutary examples involve cripples, people misshapen and deformed, and amputees. Physical limitations are no impediment to one's achieving the full complement of uselessness, but why aim at uselessness and non-disturbance?

Disturbance arises from the presumption that we can alter the affairs of the world in accordance with our will. In the second section of the first chapter, Chuang-tzu concocts the story of the sage Emperor Yao offering the empire to Hsu Yu, who declines, remarking that "if you order things as Emperor, it's that already the Empire is in order" (45). Would Chuang-tzu say the same of Alexander, Napoleon, and Churchill? Do all outcomes rest in the hands of fate, a kind of preordained order that we simply cycle in and out from? That gives too little credit to human activity. Yet, there is at least one thing, which remains utterly beyond human control, namely death. Chuang-tzu's resignation to the unfathomable world of endless transformation is, in the end, a way to confront human mortality. Wherever he speaks of becoming useless it invariably aims at living out the fullness of one's allotted time as ordained by Heaven. A recurring example of this is the tree, which seems to be useless for purposes that require any alteration of its natural state.

Its trunk is too knobbly and bumpy to measure with the inked line, its branches are too curly and crooked to fit compasses or L-square. Stand it up in the road and a carpenter wouldn't give it a glance. Now this talk of yours is big but *useless*, dismissed by everyone alike. (Graham, 47; cf. Also 73, 75)

What good does uselessness confer? Certainly, no utilitarian goals are considered, such as the greatest good for the greatest number. There is no sense of expending effort to become something more, something better, or something "useful" in the normal sense. What the undisturbed tree does achieve is living out its allotted time and what makes this possible for trees and especially for humans is perfecting the art of uselessness, for, as Chuang-tzu says, "... something which is useless will never be disturbed" (Palmer, 6).⁶ Could this be the aim of Chuang-tzu's teaching, to avoid being disturbed in life merely to live to a ripe old age? There is some justification for this view. Consider the following passages (emphasis mine):

(Graham, 78); Also, "The Power is the wholly *at peace with itself* on the course which is in accord." (Graham, 81. Emphasis mine).

⁶ I use Palmer's translation here, simply because it makes the point more accessible. Graham says, "If you're no use at all, Who'll come to bother you?"(47).

"Bring all things together under the Equality of Heaven, . . . and *learn to grow old*." (Palmer, 20)

"Follow the Middle Course, . . . to sustain your life, . . . and *to live for many years*." (Palmer, 22)

"The tree is useless. . . . *This is why it has lived so long*."
(Palmer, 33; cf. 167)

"If a man like this, deformed in body, can make a living and *live out the years Heaven sends him*, how much more should a man who is only deformed in terms of his Virtue?" (Palmer, 35)

"The cosmos . . . *guides me into old age* and settles me in death."
(Palmer, 54)⁷

Perfecting the useless is a way of renouncing choice of any destination or activity as better and this accords perfectly with accepting Heaven's way and the transformations of things. The adjustment to change is a kind of resignation and in this sense it is still. It no longer seeks accomplishment, competition, reputation or any of the worldly activities that result in tumultuous striving. At the same time it is a kind of acceptance and in this way it is tranquil. Anxiety and expectation are overcome and one adopts the attitude of welcome and openness to inevitable change. Ironically, it is just here in Chuang-tzu that roaming and uselessness merge.

Now if you have a great tree and think it's a pity it's so *useless*, why not plant it in the realm of Nothingwhatever, in the wilds which spread out in to nowhere, and go *roaming* away to do nothing at its side, *ramble* around and fall asleep in its shade? (Graham, 47. Emphasis added)

The activity most in accord with Chuang-tzu's world-view, roaming or rambling, is best achieved in the realm of the useless. Languishing in the grass while sleeping under the shade of a vast tree are enormously pleasant ways of passing the time, much better than laboring and toiling at activities that cause pain and discomfort or worry and anxiety. Since outcomes are unpredictable, Heaven's Way is inscrutable and we can never be sure of the effects of our actions. In fact, we ought judiciously to avoid any attempts at improving the external world lest we become pests and meddlers. Yet, by letting things achieve the way intended by Heaven, things work out much better than anything that a determined human will could achieve. The "great tree" mentioned above didn't intend to provide luxurious shade for anyone who happens to roam in its vicinity. It just did. With this as a model

⁷ While I have tried to limit my argument to the inner chapters, here are more examples from later passages to bolster the point.

"In times past . . . *people lived until a good age*." (Palmer, 79)

"Guard and *take care of your body*, then the rest takes good care of itself." (Palmer, 86)

"To achieve, . . . *long life* without organization." (Palmer, 130)

"In those times . . . *no living thing suffered early death*." (Palmer, 134)

"*Perfect happiness is keeping yourself alive*." (Palmer, 150)

of letting things be, practicing non-interference, and uselessness, the full allotment of life is achieved in an environment of stillness and tranquility.

Chuang-tzu's Transformation

Cicero said of Socrates that he brought philosophy down from the heavens, as if to say that what mattered most to Socrates were the things of man, the human things. Socrates dealt primarily with moral and political things as befitting man's political nature. If Cicero has a Chinese counterpart, he might have said the same of Confucius or Mencius or the parade of thinkers, who, by amazing coincidence, lived roughly the same time as Socrates. As mentioned earlier all of Chuang-tzu's philosophical predecessors acknowledge the Tao and its primacy. Yet, they differentiate Heaven's way from man's way and make reason and the human capacity for thought the ultimate arbiter of how one should live in accord with the Tao. That means learning, cultivating one's intellect, and practicing virtue and benevolence, with compassion and concern for others as an important aspect of right conduct.

Chuang-tzu, by contrast, returns philosophy to the heavens. What matters most to him is the eternal law, the Tao, and its governance of all things human and divine, but with an entirely new and different emphasis. His philosophical language bespeaks a perspective broader than that of the human. He turns us toward the eternal, the infinite, and the timeless. To occupy this philosophical space removes boundaries that differentiate a "this" from a "that", as if to distinguish were to be merely petty. It sees unity in all things and the oneness at work in the world, as displayed in the perpetual transformations of things. Perhaps most significant for human life, and most difficult, is "to recognize death and life as a single strand," as if to say that one accepts life and death as simply two complementary manifestations of one thread of being (Graham, 79). One is tempted to think of this as a way of removing the fear of death, much as Socrates attempted when he argued in Plato's *Apology* that fear of death is nothing more than a form of ignorance. Chuang-tzu could make the same claim, but it would be a different kind of ignorance. It would not be the kind of ignorance of one's true nature as something essentially intelligent and desirous of union with the intelligent source of the universe. Rather, it's an ignorance of the Tao, the eternal principle of change that leads to the recognition that all things are tied to one another in their ceaseless roaming.

Hence, the new philosophical vocabulary introduced by Chuang-tzu, which encourages a useless, spontaneous, roaming existence is not urging us to lead lives of avoidance, escape, or blissful ignorance. To the contrary, he urges us to face the true nature of being, the ever changing Tao, and give ourselves over to its power.

A very thoughtful, wide-ranging, clearly written essay – “sexy” too, I may add. The insight you build towards on page 10 is really very powerful, and worth dwelling upon more. The “mystical” power of erotic union (as seen in Jayadeva’s poem *Gitagovinda*, which you will enjoy) has in itself claims that reach beyond both dharma and intelligibility. All forms of yogic practice seem to breach the common human good-life equilibrium of virtue-wealth-pleasure by insisting on extremism regarding either Dharma or Kama, single-minded concentration. But with the equally mystical (one-becomes-two-become-three) allure of connubial generation, there is a new integration of the three, which might be why it FEELS so good when one pours one’s whole self into it. The book of Genesis also lays strong emphasis on the notion of *wife* and son. In Confucian thinking, the rightness of this triad is acknowledged in filiality. The one area where your essay needed broadening is the placing of sexual generation in the context of the numerous other kinds of generation in Book 1: why are so many kinds of generation there, and what is sexual procreation set against? Sex makes individuals, but therefore also death – because with asexual procreation there is no individual that can die (e.g. with bacteria). So sex MEANS death – is that perhaps one of the reasons why we can lose ourselves in sex as no other animal can, because one part of us intuits its place in the larger cycles of being?

The Importance of Human Sexuality in *The Mahabharata*

The Mahābhārata is at times a very sexy epic. This is not to say that sex is by any means the main theme or even among the most prominent themes. The actual instances when carnality and sexual relations are described are quite few in the overall scheme. Nevertheless, in an epic, arguably holy, since it is said to have been composed by Vyāsa “after he had arranged the eternal Veda”¹ and, furthermore, claiming to be weightier than the Vedas in terms of its teaching,² *The Mahābhārata* is far more earthy and explicit than what one encounters in either the Vedas or the Upanishads (at least in my limited experience). In sharp contrast to many of the Upanishads, thought to contain the highest wisdom of the Vedic teachings, which emphasize the soul and its purity, ritual sacrifice, and seeking the highest truth, all of which imply a diminished concern for the body, *The Mahabharata*, by contrast, revels in human seduction, lovemaking, and enjoyment of the flesh without condemnation, denigration, or contempt. One can only suppose that the extent to which the epic presents stories that are explicitly erotic must be taken to contribute in some way to the overall teaching or wisdom of the book.³ Good opening paragraph. Some of the Vedas do deal with earthier things, but maybe not so directly.

¹ Book I (1) 1, 53. It is even referred to as “the fifth Veda” [I (6) 57, 75].

² “Once the divine seers foregathered, and on one scale they hung the four Vedas in the balance, and on the other scale *The Bhārata*; and both in size and in weight it (*The Mahābhārata*) was heavier.” I (1) 1, 208-10.

³ I realize that it is a presumption to claim that there is such a thing as “an overall teaching.” It is also clear to me that one can always find pieces of text to substantiate the point that one wants to make

What, then, is the importance of human sexuality in *The Mahābhārata*? One simple reply is that the fate of humanity depends on sexual reproduction. And yet that doesn't account for very much. Procreation can occur in a mechanical fashion without reference to the pleasurable allure of sex. The mere fact of human reproduction could be mentioned without reference to any details of sexual or conjugal relations as in the case of the early Biblical genealogy ("and X begot Y") from Adam to Methuselah. There is Onan, and lots of episodes about foreskins...and the Books of Samuel. In the context of an epic with cosmic dimensions and its relentless attention to *dharma*, human nature, as expressed in human sexuality, is governed by a law all its own that is important for procreation and marriage – a life giving and life affirming force that runs contrary to the deadly apocalyptic battle that is at the heart of the epic.

Closely connected with the theme of human sexuality is the theme of marriage. While not inextricably connected in the narrative, there is an important link that, even when not explicit, can be inferred. Nature was wise in devising a plan for reproduction that made it intensely pleasurable and transcendent in its own way, a theme to which I will return. The pleasure and transcendence of human sexuality represent a force in human life that is arguably equal to or greater than *dharma*, which, when opposed, that is, when nature opposes *dharma*, presents a powerful human dilemma. This, too, will be discussed below, but first I want to present some evidence for my initial claims about sexuality in the epic. "The Book of the Beginning" provides examples of human sexuality, all of them occurring before the marriage of Draupadi to the five Pandava brothers. So I will look at several of these in order to draw some inferences about the importance of sex and marriage to the overall text.

While not exactly an example of the sort that I will presently address, the first introduction we have to conjugal affairs occurs in the story of Utanka, whose guru, when pressed, consents to a gift and directs his student to bring whatever his wife requests.⁴ The guru's wife requests the earrings of the wife of King Pausya to wear for an upcoming Brahmin reception. On reflection the idea of adorning oneself for the twice-born, who are the conductors of holy ritual ceremony and often the masters of austerities, seems at odds with their very practices. At the court of King

while ignoring contradictory passages, such as this one from a later book, which runs counter to my whole argument: "I will tell you my son, how Brahma created wanton women and for what purpose, for there is nothing more evil than women...The Lord Grandfather, learning what was in the hearts of the Gods, created wanton women by a magic ritual in order to delude mankind." 13.40.3-10 Despite this counter position, I believe that my argument holds up.

⁴ 1(3) 3, 96.

Pausya, Utanka is directed to the women's quarters, where the queen with the earrings awaits him. His petition is delayed owing to his state of pollution, which prohibits a face to face encounter with a faithful wife. The state of marital fidelity has a certain purity about it that precludes contact with anyone not sufficiently purified by cleansing. Once Utanka purifies himself, Pausya's wife is only too happy to accommodate his request, ostensibly to satisfy a worthy student wanting to make a guru's gift. Clearly, the wife sees that the earrings are for another woman. In short, even among the holiest caste, the Brahmins, it is understood that feminine adornment is both acceptable and desired. Don't forget, these are not monks or renunciates, but the caste is composed mainly of householders who have normal social needs; it is the occupation that is different.

One of the earliest examples of simple sexuality occurs in the story of King Vasu, father of Satyavati, the great-great grandmother of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Vasu was a retired hunter, whose austerities worried Indra lest he become his equal. By way of diversion toward earthly rule, Indra honored Vasu, setting him up as 'King Uparicara' [1(6) 57, 33]. After fathering five sons, Vasu took as wife Girika, an offspring of the river Suktimati and the mountain Kolahala. When Girika announced that she was ready to conceive, Vasu's ancestors ordered him to go hunting, but his thoughts turned toward his beautiful wife, the mere thought of who caused him to ejaculate [1(6) 57, 40]. His seed, preserved on a tree leaf, was eventually stolen by a bird and dropped into the Yamuna River, impregnating a fish, that gave birth to Satyavati.

As casual as the story appears, the fact of Vasu's orgasm at the mere thought of his fertile wife bespeaks the powerful natural attraction of the sexes. The unavoidable command of the ancestors to go hunting and "Shoot some deer" [1(6) 57, 38], an admonition equal to "go take a cold shower," proves ineffective. !!! Vasu's determination to preserve the emitted semen proves fateful, for the entire Paurava line depends on it. So, the epic narrative relates not only the line of succession, but one of the crucial sexual event that launches it. What do you make of the fate of the seed post-ejaculation, which seems so unsexual?

In the genealogy of the Pandavas and the Kauravas, as Satyavati stands on one side of the more immediate line of descent, so does Samtanu stand on the other. Samtanu's progenitors, Duhsanta and Sakuntala, play an important role in the narrative, especially in connection with marriage, which I will discuss below, however the story of Sakuntala's birth resembles in some ways that of Satyavati. Visvamitra, the father of Sakuntala, incurs the jealousy and anger of Indra, who worries that Visvamitra's advanced practice of austerities, like that of Vasu, will threaten his power. To eliminate the threat, Indra sends the beautiful Apsara, Menaka, to seduce Visvamitra.

The cooperative wind causes Menaka's skirt to come off permitting Visvamitra to see her nude [1(7b) 66, 5]. Despite his brahminic ascetic discipline, Visvamitra "fell victim to love. . . . The pair of them whiled away a very long time in the woods making love when the spirit seized them, and it seemed only a day" [1(7b) 66, 8].

This theme of humans practicing austerities to the point that they rival the gods in power is repeated again and again. Another such is Gautama, whose practice of weaponry and austerities causes Indra anxiety. The god sends out a young Apsura named Jalapadi, who appears to Gautama in the wilderness "wearing one single cloth" [1(7) 120, 8]. Despite his best efforts at self-control, Gautama cannot prevent his seed from spilling on a stalk, which splits in two, giving rise to the twins Krpa and Krpi. Again, the sexual impulse gets an unisexual diversion. In a similar manner another seer, Bharadvaja, witnessed the Apsara, Ghrtaci, alighting from a bath when "a sudden breeze blew her skirt away, whereupon his seed burst forth," from which the great weapon instructor, Drona, was born.

All four instances mentioned above involve disciplined ascetics, who, nonetheless, are entirely susceptible to the blandishments of feminine attraction. One can't help but wonder how seers and Brahmins, described as so practiced in austerities that their powers rival Indra's, could so easily become prey to sexual allure. One expects the ultimate sign of brahminic asceticism to be sexual abstinence, as, for example, in the case of Sakuntala's father, Kanva, of whom Duhsanta says, "The reverend lord, whom the world worships, has never spilled his seed!" [1(7b) 65, 17]. And yet, in light of the examples above, Kanva's strict observance of abstinence is the exception. Ironically, Indra and the other gods who feel anxious about burgeoning human power appear to know that they can almost always count on the power of sexual attraction when threatened, even by the most practiced Brahmin. One can only conclude that, for all the power possessed by disciplined ascetics, the power that women have over men and the power that eros has over asceticism reigns supreme.

Perhaps the quintessential story of sexual seduction is that of Samtanu and Ganga. The complex back-story is important for the continuation of the line of Kuru. Samtanu was originally Mahabhisa, who, while in heaven in the company of Brahma, deliberately looked at the beautiful river goddess, Ganga, when the wind blew her skirt up, while the other gods looked away [1(7) 91, 5]. Later, for reasons of her own, Ganga implores Pratipa, the future father of Samtanu, "[M]ake love to me! For the strict do not countenance the rejection of a woman who is in love" [1(7) 92, 5]. Pratipa resists, presumably because he discerns that Ganga is dissembling and actually fulfilling a

request of the Vasus to bear an offspring. However, Ganga consents to wait for Samtanu to be her husband. In due time, Pratipa instructs Samtanu to anticipate the goddess and his first encounter is described as follows:

And there he saw one day a beautiful woman who fairly blazed with loveliness, like Sri the lotus goddess come to earth. Her body was flawless, her teeth impeccable, and celestial ornaments adorned her. She was alone, wearing a sheer skirt; and she shone like the calyx of a lotus. When he saw her, he shivered, astounded by the perfection of her shape; and this overlord of men could not cease drinking her with his eyes. [1(7) 92, 26-30]

Such a description is highly erotically charged. Indeed, Samtanu is rendered helpless, overcome with passion. So intense is their love that when Samtanu finally makes his move, time stands still, as it did for Visvamitra and Menaka mentioned above.

And so immersed was the king in his pleasure, and so carried away by the talents of this superb woman, that he was not aware of how many years, or seasons, or months, were passing by. While the lord of men made love to her as the spirit seized them, he begot on her eight sons who resembled immortals. [1(7) 92, 42-44]

Yet another Paurava ancestor, Samvarana, is so smitten by the beauty of Tapati, that he twice faints, “stunned by the God of Love” when he thinks himself to have lost the object of his love [1(11) 161, 1-2].

One might assume that sexuality and its seductive power is peculiar to humans, as the stories of Menaka, Ganga, and Tapati demonstrate, but the story of Tilottama shows that sexual power works just as well on gods as on men. To divide and conquer the Asura brothers, Sunda and Upasunda, who are bent on conquering the world, Brahma commissions a perfect harlot, Tilottama, who so effectively entices the brothers that they kill one another out of love for her, but not before gawking Indra sprouts 1,000 eyes and gaping Sthanu develops four faces, so riveted are they by her beauty [1(16) 203, 20-30].

The father of the Pandavas, Pandu himself, met his death, because he couldn't restrain the sexual urge for his second wife, Madri, though cursed to die if he engaged in sexual intercourse. The curse came about as a result of a hunting incident, when Pandu shot a hermit, in the guise of a buck, mating with a doe. The dying man/deer, acquiring a human voice, called the murder an atrocity, not because a man killed a deer, but because he interrupted the act of reproduction.

I do not blame you for killing deer, king, because of myself. But out of kindness you should have waited until I was done mating! For what man of sense would kill a buck that is mating in the woods, at a time beneficent to all creatures and wanted by all creatures? Needlessly to frustrate a cherished goal of man was not worthy of you, Kaurava, who are born into the lineage of the Pauravas and those seers of unsullied acts! This most cruel act is decried by all the worlds; it is ungodly and dishonorable, utterly against the Law. You know the niceties of the pleasure of women, and you know the points of Scripture, Law, and Profit – it is unworthy of you who resemble a God to perpetrate such an ungodly deed! [1(7) 109, 18-23]

For the transgression of interrupting sexual intercourse the hermit curses Pandu and the reasons given are powerful. He appeals to the universality of the goodness and desirability of sexual reproduction, calling it “a cherished goal of man,” something recognized by all creatures in “all the worlds.” He appeals to the utter repugnance of bringing about death to one engaged in the reproduction of life. The hermit calls it “ungodly,” “dishonorable,” and “utterly against the Law.” Since the gods have either bestowed on humans the power of reproduction or displayed for them the capacity that they already possess, it is easily inferred that human sexual reproduction is encouraged by the gods, perhaps so that the gods can obtain more sacrifices. It follows, then, that to inhibit or prevent it would be ungodly. If encouraged by the gods, then the performance of the sex act must be something both holy and noble. To interfere with it would be sacrilegious, in a way, and thereby dishonorable in depriving the participant of the completion of the sacred act. Lastly, the perpetuation of mankind depends on sexual reproduction and since it is desirable, cherished, and necessary, it is against the Law.

Many of the episodes recounted above involve divine plots and machinations for the purposes of seducing humans for one end or another, yet there is no such thing as “fate” as it relates to love. Rather there is a reliance on the power of human sexuality and a tacit acknowledgement that it is a potent force acting on the human will. In another context one might well ascribe such a force to human nature acting according to its own innate, dynamic powers. Here, however, the assumption is that the sexual urge is at work, on gods, men, and everyone else in between. It is a reliable and powerful force, yet not one *prima facie* connected to the cosmic forces at play in the epic. As mentioned above in Samvarana’s encounter with Tapati, the “God of Love” is mentioned in the text as the cause of Samvarana’s intense desire, but no such god is ever named or worshipped as, for example, in Greek mythology Aphrodite and Eros control passionate alliances. The word that is translated here as “God of Love” is *kama*.

Throughout the *Mahābhārata* occasional references are made to Law, Profit, and Pleasure (*dharma*, *artha*, *kama*) and these are the rules “for the conduct of worldly affairs” [1(1) 1, 46-7]. *Dharma* as “Law” comes up repeatedly as the foundational principle governing human conduct, making Profit and Pleasure seem subordinate. Nevertheless, Pleasure, as the governor of passion, sexuality, love and eventually marriage, exerts a force that is autonomous and unavoidable. Look at the three as “ends of life” instead, from a commonsense perspective: no human life can be good without virtue/rightness, material means, pleasure. The problem of living then becomes the finding of an appropriate equilibrium between the three.

So, what is the connection between *dharma* and *kama*? Are marriage and the sexual enjoyment that accompanies it commanded by *dharma*, at least for humans? In one way, it would seem not, since *dharma* is often thought of as a kind of duty to do the right thing according to one’s station. By contrast, sex is desirable in a way that doesn’t make it seem a duty any more than to eat or indulge one’s natural pleasures. Of course, the same cannot be said for marriage. One could simply indulge in sexual gratification with no regard for marriage or procreation. While some gods do have wives and consorts, the *dharma* of marriage does not exist for them in the way it does for humans. The story of Sakuntala’s birth perfectly exemplifies this. Indra sends Menaka to seduce Visvamitra to protect himself from the ascetic’s power. The god does not give a single thought to the outcome of their sexual liaison nor does the Apsura, Menaka, who abandons her baby on a riverbank once her task on behalf of Indra is completed. While human sexuality becomes a useful tool for the gods to be able to manipulate humans, they do not appear to have any regard for marriage and the nurture of offspring. Is reproduction to be regarded as merely the casual outcome of pleasurable sex? The birth of Sakuntala suggests otherwise.

The hermit, Kanya, adopts the abandoned offspring of Menaka, chancing to see the baby by the river. In recounting the story of her birth to Duhsanta, Sakuntala, using the words of Kanya, discloses the *dharmic* view about parenting, in this case as it relates to fatherhood: “In the decisions of Law they quote three kinds of fathers respectively: the one who begets the child’s body, the one who saves its life, and the one who gives it food” [1(7b) 66, 13-14]. In light of the esteem in which Kanya is held, his pronouncement must be taken as having authority. The unavoidable conclusion is that mere begetting carries the least weight in terms of *dharmic* connection. Saving and sustaining a life carry more. One sees this principle repeated throughout the epic as in the births of Pandu, Dhrtarashtra, and the five Pandava brothers, whose familial associations and upbringing

trump their actual blood lineage in significance. Well observed. Note Freud's remark that all fathers are adoptive fathers.

The story of Pandu and the shooting of the deer introduce a deeper side to the theme of human sexuality. The hermit's dying lament forges an important link between the pleasure of sex and the law of reproduction. Sex appears to have a goal, which is not mere pleasure, but human reproduction. What is being endorsed here is not mere fornication, but sex leading to offspring and that must take place in the context of marriage.

The ultimate story on marriage is the story of Duhsanta and Sakuntala. As in the earlier cases of sexual seduction, Duhsanta is initially attracted by Sakuntala's beauty and she is described in a fashion much like the other feminine beauties, **fair-waisted** with "beautiful hips, a lustrous appearance, and a charming smile" [1(7b) 65, 11]. What distinguishes this union is the discussion of the various forms of lawful marriage and the recognition that sex, love, and sexual reproduction achieve *dharmic* status when they culminate in marriage. Interestingly, Duhsanta, speaking on behalf of *dharma*, acknowledges Sakuntala's autonomy when he announces, "You yourself can lawfully make the gift of yourself" [1(7b) 67, 7]. Hence, the consummation of their union is delayed until Duhsanta promises to a marriage covenant, demanded by Sakuntala, that acknowledges their offspring as the rightful successor [1(7b) 67, 15]. Only after he vows to uphold his promise do they make love. Their marriage is bound by a sacred rite, a covenant, which thereby bestows legitimacy on their offspring. Sakuntala represents a new development in sexual union and procreation. Sexuality is subordinate to marriage and, while pleasant in itself, it is ultimately for the sake of offspring. Marriage sanctifies sexual union.

The story then takes an unexpected turn, when, Sakuntala, who had been living with her father, gave birth to a son and, after several years, is instructed to return to her husband to present the son and resume their marriage as a family. Duhsanta, fully mindful of his promise, claims not to remember their union or his vow and attempts to send Sakuntala and her son away. The angry but controlled wife argues powerfully, resisting the temptation to curse Duhsanta, a recourse followed by several characters in earlier stories. Instead, she gives an argument in praise of marriage and the value that it bestows. The argument is so significant that it bears closer inspection.

First, at the risk of gross understatement, *The Mahabharata* is not a one-dimensional epic. That is to say that there is no simple, succinct, coherent moral or religious doctrine to be drawn out nor can one say that there is a consistent characterization of any types, whether men or gods, males or females. There is depth and complexity in every facet of the epic. As an example, consider the

story, mentioned above, of Tapati, who marries Samvarana and gives birth to Kuru. Samvarana, stricken to the point of incapacity by Tapati's beauty, declares his love and desire to marry her. For her part, she replies, "I am not my own mistress, sire, for I am a girl with a father. . . . I am not mistress of my body, therefore, good king, I cannot come to you; for women are always dependent" [1(11) 161, 14-18]. By contrast, the story of Sakuntala directly contradicts the claim that "women are always dependent." Duhsanta asks Sakuntala to marry him as an independent agent, one entirely in control of her own destiny. Even though Sakuntala replies with a kind of hypothetical "[I]f I am my own mistress, then, chief of the Pauravas, this is my condition in giving myself in marriage" [1(7b) 67, 15], the hypothetical applies not so much to whether or not Sakuntala is free to accept Duhsanta in marriage as to whether or not he will accept her condition, a self-willed, original, independently determined condition. Sakuntala makes a strong demand and later a strong argument to persuade Duhsanta to live up to his agreement.

Sakuntala's argument has three main components. The first invokes truth as a necessary condition of matrimony, the second appeals to the importance of wives for the fulfillment of the husband's earthly existence, the third presents children, specifically sons, as the source of the greatest joy possible in this life. I will explain this more fully.

Duhsanta's initial rejection of Sakuntala and their son provokes the woman to great anger, but she manages to control her fury and she resorts to reasoned argument – a tribute to her self-possession and independence. Duhsanta's bald-faced lie evokes the anger and provides the occasion for Sakuntala to praise truth-telling. First, she relegates lying to the kind of thing only a commoner would do, not worthy of a king. Second, in a manner reminiscent of many Socratic injunctions, she warns that lying makes one "a thief who robs his own soul," [1(7b) 68, 27]. In short, one harms oneself. Last, husbands and wives owe one another trust and honor, which are impossible if one of the partners is dishonest.

Moving from the more general principles regarding truth, Sakuntala proceeds to the more specific conditions of the value of wives. Not only is the wife the bearer of the children, but "[t]he wife is half the man, a wife is better than his best friend, a wife is the root of Law, Profit, and Love" [1(7b) 68, 39-40]. Wives are sources of comfort in adversity and provide the occasion for the husband to be faithful and trustworthy. Their union endures even into future lives and each joins the other in death. A man without a wife lives in an impoverished state and cannot reach the highest fulfillment of human life.

The third and most compelling part of her argument has to do with the pleasure of having a son. The son becomes the source of the father's greatest joy – that of seeing the offspring as another self. “[Y]ou, being one, have been made two” 1(7b) 68, 65]. Here we see a kind of mystical transformation. A father, being one, has a son and becomes two. The son becomes part of the father in a way that no other being can, not even the wife. Thus, the father has a share of life in himself and also in his son.⁵ In addition, since the son is the guarantor of the continuation of the father's lineage, the father is able to pay the debt owed to the ancestors.⁶ This debt is recalled by Pandu after the incident with the deer and the curse on him forbidding him to engage in sex with his wives, thereby preventing him, at least initially, from fulfilling his own debt to the ancestors. Pandu recounts the story of the hermit, Svetaketu, son of a seer, Uddalaka, who, infuriated by the former practice of Brahmins taking pleasure with married women, established a new law forbidding adultery and requiring a wife to submit to a husband's demand to bear offspring [1(7d) 113, 9-22]. As if in fulfillment of this new law, Pandu's wife, Kunti, manages to circumvent his curse, and call on an old boon to reproduce with the god of her choice, who will act as surrogate for her husband, Pandu. Her first conception is with the God Dharma, as if to forge a bond between Law and marriage.

Altogether Sakuntala's appeal to marriage goes far beyond the demand for her to be accepted as wife of Duhsanta and for Bharata to be accepted as their son. Her argument elevates marriage to the status of a law all its own. Whatever the role of *dharma*, marriage is a law unto itself, necessary for procreation and the continuation of species, important for human character development as a basis for truth, trust, and loyalty, and transcendent as a means to arguably the highest human happiness – the mystical transformation of two individuals into one couple, one pair of parents, one united soul, who, in having offspring become two again insofar as a part of each of them continues in their offspring. This is perhaps the deepest appeal to nature or to a law that governs human life as a means to happiness and an end in itself. This “law” of nature or humanity co-exists with, or

⁵ In a perverse sort of way the same argument might be made to explain Dhrtarastra's unyielding attachment to his own son, Duryodhana, despite all advice and counsel to oppose his son's intentions.

⁶ “The sons of man are born on earth with four debts, which are to be paid to the ancestors, Gods, seers, and men, a hundredfold, a thousandfold. The man who does not heed them when their time comes is destitute of worlds, so the scholars of the Law lay down. With sacrifices he pleases the Gods, with study and austerities the seers, **with sons** (my emphasis) and sraddhas the ancestors, with benevolence men” [1(7d) 111, 12-15].

possibly exceeds, *dharma*. This is a very rich paragraph. Say in what way “mystical.” The subsequent paragraphs are really only a coda to this.

We now see that human sexuality, far from being debased or a distraction from one’s *dharma*, leads to and elevates one beyond mere solitary human existence. The pleasure of sexuality (*kama*) becomes the motive that leads to marriage, the permanent union that permits the ephemeral pleasure of sex to become the enduring pleasure of union, responsibility, nurturing, passionate concern, and love. There is a progression in pleasure from mere sexuality to friendship with one’s spouse and shared joy in their offspring. While this may seem troubling in the context of an epic in which later it is argued that love is the greatest impediment to the goals of the successful life of a *yogin*,⁷ -- because the yogic life doesn’t have the same end as a normal human life *kama* insofar as it is connected to marriage is a compelling alternative to the life of asceticism. Whatever side the epic comes down on, if that can ever be determined, the case for human sexuality and marriage is a strong one.

If marriage occupies a position of sacred importance, then the violation of marriage must be regarded as the greatest of sins. One of the most despicable and unlawful acts in the entire epic is the degradation and humiliation of Draupadi before her husbands. Curiously, Yudisthira and his brothers refuse to intervene when Duhshasana humiliates Draupadi publicly, ostensibly out of reverence for law, specifically the law that compels them to honor their vow and suffer the consequences of the dicing loss. What does this say about the duty to honor the law of marriage? Is this an anomaly or at odds with one of the main themes of the epic?

I don’t have an answer to this question, but it is troubling. Every time Yudisthira remembers the dicing and its evil consequences, he insists that he would have to comply if invited again. Even after the brothers leave for the forest and are temporarily joined by Vidura, who had been sent by Dhrtarastra, Yudisthira surmises about what Vidura might say and proclaims,

What will the Steward say when we meet?
Might it be that he comes at Saubala’s word,
Once more to challenge me to dicing?
Might it be that the mean-minded Saukani
Wants to lay us and win our weapons?
If challenged by anyone with ‘Come Hither!’

⁷ In *The Book of the Forest*, a Brahmin named Saunaka, said to be steeped in Samkhya and Yoga [3(29), 2, 14] claims, “Love, it is known, is the root of mental pain, for love makes a man attached, and thus he comes to grief” [3(29) 2, 26-7]. This is just another example of the numerous inconsistencies (see Footnote 3) that make it difficult to arrive at a single, unified teaching.

I'm unable, Bhima, to stay away. [3(29) 6, 7-9]

Yudisthira's confession is strange, to say the least. One way of interpreting his speech is to attribute to him a gambling addiction. While it would explain his inability to refuse an invitation, it hardly squares with his controlled, thoughtful character and the epithet "Lord *Dharma*." More likely is the interpretation that precisely in the role of Lord Dharma is he bound to observe in exemplary fashion a baronial law that compels compliance with an invitation from another of equal rank, regardless of possible consequences. If so, the law of the barons has priorities that exceed duties to wives and children. One would expect the 'law of nature' discussed earlier in the context of sexuality and marriage, the passion that one feels at the prospect of danger to a loved one, to overcome the obedience to convention. Perhaps it is owing to his ability to resist passion that earns Yudisthira his epithet. And yet Draupadi has an honored place in the household, acknowledged by her five husbands and her mother-in-law, Kunti. Her humiliation and the desire for revenge are what principally drive the Pandavas to continually press for equity. While the resolution of this problem does not occur until late in the epic, the fact that it persists as a spur to action bespeaks the grotesqueness of the affront to marriage and family and its ineluctable retribution.

A Final Thought

So much of the epic is related to war and death. Admittedly, several attempts are made to avert the final cataclysm, and yet one somehow knows that it is unavoidable. The preparations for this war occupy a good part of Book Five, "The Book of the Effort." In addition to the impending fraternal conflict, which looms as the main spectacle, there are ample instances of killing and devastation throughout. One need only think of the fire in the Khandava forest, not to mention Bhishma's abduction of the wives for his brothers, Bhima's dispatching of demonic Raksasas, Duhsanta's wanton killing of forest animals, and on and on. While some notion of fate and *dharma* may govern this concourse of events, perhaps leading up to a new eon, the epic is decidedly a human story with human dimensions, and events that are driven by human agency. From the human perspective there must be some sort of life giving force as a counterbalance to the propensity for death and devastation. Human sexuality and marriage represent the life giving balance to the destructive force of war. The transcendence discussed earlier that results from the sacred union of marriage and family withstands the assaults of war and promises renewal and continuation. We see this in the persistence of the Pandavas and their union with Draupadi, which endures all threats and somehow persists. We see it in the fact of Janamejaya, the great grandson of the heroic family,

being present throughout to hear the epic narrative. We anticipate that, just as many of his forebears fell prey to the seductive powers of feminine beautiful to produce offspring that made up his lineage, Janamejaya will some day be seduced by an Apsura, a river goddess, or a mere mortal woman with big hips. Either way, the human story will continue and, for all of the attention paid to *dharma*, *kama* will necessarily be a part of the continuing epic.

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The Politics of the Buddha: A Commentary on the Mahaparinibbana Sutta

The Mahaparinibbana Sutta recounts the last days of the Buddha. The narrative offers what it claims are the last words uttered by the Buddha. One might, for this very reason, give privileged status to his final utterances. Yet, his words repeat a frequently taught part of the *Dhamma* – namely, “all conditioned things are of a nature to decay” (6.7). One must conclude that the Buddha’s dying words were not imparting anything new, and, even if accompanied by a strong exhortation to “strive on untiringly,” the same teaching and similar exhortations can be found in other suttas.¹ If not adding anything new, one might assume that this sutta gives a final, definitive summary of the Buddha’s teaching. Again, there is nothing here that hasn’t been presented in other suttas, where many of the bedrock teachings, such as conditioned genesis and the four foundations of mindfulness, not to mention the four noble truths and the eightfold path, are spelled out in much greater detail. Considered in this light, the Mahaparinibbana Sutta seems dispensable as a necessary part of the doctrine, in which case, one wonders what is the significance of the discourse concerning the Buddha’s last days.

Rather than imparting any additional doctrine, the primary aim of this sutta is the establishment of the conditions for the continuation of the Buddha’s teaching, especially in light of the fact that, being mortal, his end is at hand. He must prepare for the final transmission of the *Dhamma* and its continuation through the *sangha* after his death. The necessary condition for its continuation is the firm establishment of the *sangha*, the body of monks, nuns, and lay followers, who will inherit the *Dhamma* and must guarantee its promulgation without the living presence of the Buddha. For this reason the Mahaparinibbana Sutta seems uniquely political in nature and not primarily pedagogical. By political I mean that his aim has more to do with the

¹ In fact, the exact same words as his final words are said earlier in this sutta at 3.51.

organization and stabilization of the community of monks, who will be instrumental in disseminating the *Dhamma*, than in explaining anything new about the teaching. Ultimately, he appears to aim at making the *Dhamma* available to the widest possible audience for the eventual goal of universal liberation from suffering.

On the face of it, such a thesis invites skepticism. Does the Buddha really have a political agenda? Can any true spiritual teacher have worldly aims, which any political goal must have? Here one must distinguish between a political goal and a political teaching. I am not claiming that the Buddha's teaching is fundamentally political. Rather, it is to allow personal liberation from the world of suffering for everyone who receives and embraces the doctrine. However, since a fundamental claim is that life itself is suffering, then every human being is implicated and can thereby profit from the teaching. The teaching offers the way to overcome suffering. In order to make it universally available, several conditions are necessary. First, there must be a well-established teaching that makes the path to the cessation of suffering known. Second, there must be a body of people who demonstrate that their grasp of the teaching is in accord with what the Buddha taught, a group of trained disciples. Last, there must be some assurance that the teaching will be disseminated accurately and fervently after the death of the Buddha. These three conditions are precisely the ones that the Buddha means to secure before his death and, in this sense, his final goal is political in nature.

The Mahaparinibbana Sutta is divided into six "recitations" sections. However, I propose a somewhat different divisional scheme – a tripartite division – that better illustrates my claim about the Buddha's political legacy. The first section opens with a reference to King Ajatasattu of Magadha and his declared intention to destroy the Vajjians, a confederacy of Licchavis of Vesali and Vedevis of Videha, both cities north of Magadha on the other side of

the Ganges. It ends with the departure of the King's minister, Vassakara, from the Buddha (1.1 – 1.5). Embedded in this section, then, is an important teaching about the King and, indirectly about misguided political power. The second and longest section in my scheme begins with the Buddha requesting an assembly of the local monks for the purpose of giving final instructions in order to leave the *sangha* on firm foundations. It also includes the narrative of the Buddha's final visits to a number of towns and villages that were part of his regular ministry route. It ends with the death of the Buddha (1.6 – 6.10). This section conveys the means by which the *sangha* will continue and the teaching will be promulgated without the presence of the Buddha himself. This goal is the heart and soul of the sutta. The third and final section recounts the events immediately after the death of the Buddha, his cremation, and the distribution of his remains for the purpose of erecting stupas as places of commemoration. The importance here lies in the reminders of the Buddha's actual life and teaching as a way of giving credibility to his teaching and the possibility of attaining liberation from the world of *samsara*. Since the Mahaparinibbana Sutta is one of the longest of the early discourses, I want to focus on those parts that directly support my thesis, which are mostly contained in Sections One and Two.

Section One: King Ajatasattu

Given the title of the sutta, which intimates the imminent passing of the Buddha from the world of *samsara* to *Nibbana*, it is rather strange to have it open with King Ajatasattu sending his minister, Vassakara, to announce to the Buddha the King's intention of attacking and destroying the Vajjians and then to return and report faithfully what the Buddha says. Does the King expect the Buddha to endorse violence? For what purpose is this attack? At this point, any answer to the last questions would be merely speculative, although we learn later (2.15) that

the Licchavis live in a village that permits courtesans and they, themselves, are highly attuned to external appearances, as indicated by their use of makeup and excessive adornments in going out to meet the Buddha, when he visits Vesali (2.12 – 2.20). Also, they are clearly competitive, greedy for recognition, in vying with the courtesan Ambapali for the honor of feasting the Buddha and his monks. So, one could argue, albeit on the basis of scant evidence, that King Ajatasattu wants to attack the Vajjians in order to humble the Licchavis, whose lifestyle is not only out of keeping with the Buddha's teaching, but an impediment to it. If that were the case, one would have to regard the King as a "warrior for Buddha" if such a phrase could be anything other than oxymoronic. Recalling from Sutta Two, *The Fruits of the Homeless Life*, that King Ajatasattu declares himself to be a lay follower of the Buddha (1.99), one might be tempted to give him the benefit of the doubt here and say that the King was merely misguided in thinking that any form of violence would serve the Buddha's plans. What follows in the Sutta, however, does not appear to support such a charitable reading.²

Vassakara arrives at Vulture's Peak, where the Buddha is accessible only on foot, and delivers the King's message. The Buddha, somewhat surprisingly in the presence of the minister, speaks directly to his attendant Ananda about the laudable practices of the Vajjians, that are designed to lead to their prosperity and to avoid their decline. In fact, the first four of the seven components of these practices are identical to the first four of the seven points that the Buddha teaches to his monks in his first set of instructions after Vassaka's departure (1.6). King Ajatasattu is obviously ignorant of these salutary practices of the Vajjians. Interestingly, Vassakara agrees that the Vajjians will never be conquered by force, "but only by means of propaganda and setting them against one another" (1.5). In short, one must undermine the

² *A fortiori*, the fact that the King killed his own father, Bimbisara (Sutta 2. 99), said to be wise and benevolent (Sutta 18.4; Cf. Also 2.102).

practices of the Vajjians, which emphasize political harmony, in order to defeat them. It is curious that the Buddha addresses these remarks to Ananda and not to Vassakara, but then the Buddha tells Vassakara that these principles are ones that he himself taught to the Vajjians. It follows that if they have embraced the teaching and if the Buddha tells the truth (“Tathagatas never lie” [1.2]), then we must assume that the Vajjians are invulnerable to attack, thus making Ajatasattu appear even more misguided. Immediately Vassakara acknowledges the futility of his own King’s plans and takes his leave, uttering the same remark that his King uttered elsewhere when he declared himself to be a lay-follower, “I am busy and have much to do” (1.5; Cf. Sutta 2, 1.101).

There follows a reply, which occurs several times, not only in this sutta, but in others. When Vassakara announces his departure, the Buddha replies, “Brahmin do as you think fit” (1.5). Virtually the same reply is made to the King in Sutta 2, when he announces his intention to leave the Buddha (Sutta 2, 1.101). Very soon after this, after Ananda had assembled the monks in response to the Buddha’s request, Ananda says, “Now is the time for the Lord to do as he sees fit” (1.6).³ We see that this is not merely a directive from the Buddha to the monks, but from them to him. Later, as we will see, it is addressed to householders as well. This final remark, each time it is repeated by the Buddha, makes it clear that he is not issuing commands, but advice, that, if adopted, makes each follower responsible for his own actions. On the one hand, it seems rather empty, almost as if one were to say, “Do as you like,” without attaching much personal responsibility. On the other hand, it displays a subtle acknowledgement that *kamma* productions are connected to acts that are chosen and willed. We are not puppets or mechanically determined beings, in which case there would be no *kammic* effect to action.

³ The same remark, or a close facsimile, is repeated at 1.21, 1.25, 3.6, 3.49, and 6.12.

Every act in the world of *samsara* is accompanied by consequences, partly conditioned by the action. We, in a sense, own the act. Hence, it is incumbent on us to act mindfully, as is fitting, and not any way one pleases.⁴

The case of King Ajatasattu and his Brahmin minister, Vassakara, reveals something important about worldly affairs. The very nature of political rule precludes leisure and the condition necessary for mindfulness meditation. One sees this in the busy-ness of the King and his minister. Without mindfulness, one is likely to be deluded by external events, as the King is, and act in a way directly at odds with the *Dhamma*. This may explain the strange opening of Sutta 16. The story of King Ajatasattu is an admonition to the monks to guard against the deluded and misguided understanding of someone like the King and to work towards turning him and others like him, at the very least, towards morality.

The first division of the Sutta 16 ends with the departure of Vassakara and the implied lesson about King Ajatasattu and his plans to conquer the Vajjians. The overt goal of the *Dhamma* is not political and the Buddha does not dispense political advice to the King, but shows by way of indirect reference to his own teaching about the futility of certain kinds of political ambitions and their impotence in the face of the *Dhamma*.

Section Two: "The Mirror of *Dhamma*"

The Sutta now turns to the more characteristic narrative in which the Buddha addresses the monks in the vicinity of Rajagaha. In the next several passages he teaches five sets of seven

⁴ This is nicely contrasted with the case of one Subhadda, who had gone forth late in life, traveling with the Venerable Kassapa the Great. He exhorts his fellow monks to stop weeping and wailing at the news of the Buddha's death and says, "We are well rid of the Great Ascetic. We were always bothered by his saying: 'It is fitting for you to do this, it is not fitting for you to do that!' Now we can do what we like, and not do what we don't like!" (6.20). One infers that this Subhadda has not truly embraced the Buddha's *Dhamma*, nor has he understood the teaching of the "Middle Way", since he still refers to the Buddha as a great ascetic, a practice he presumably gave up before his enlightenment.

things conducive to welfare and then six things conducive to communal living. As mentioned above, the first four points of the first seven addressed to the monks repeat the teachings to the Vajjians having to do with their welfare and self-preservation. Without going into a detailed analysis of these 41 points, one sees that they are all directed to the welfare and community of the *sangha*. They contain rules of living in harmony to help ensure the survival and prosperity of the *sangha*, without which the teaching will likely die out. The survival of the *Dhamma* depends on its promulgation by the *sangha*. Insofar as the Buddha directs his initial remarks to the health and harmony of the *sangha*, he thereby ensures the survival of the *Dhamma*, a principal aim of this Sutta.

After the teaching related to welfare and community, the Buddha gives the first of several “comprehensive discourses” to the monks on morality, concentration, and wisdom before departing from Rajagaha. Afterwards the Buddha visits fourteen towns and villages before his final resting place in the Mallas’ sal-grove, just outside of Kusinara, where he passes away. We don’t know how long this series of visits took, but we do know that at the Capala Shrine in Vesali he discloses to Ananda that he is eighty years old, and has determined that his final *Nibbana* will occur in the near future.⁵ The fact of his determination to visit so many places, not to mention his carrying on after becoming ill in the little village of Beluva, testifies to his deep commitment to the transmission of the *Dhamma* and the firm establishment of the *sangha*.

During the first two stops, at Ambalatthika and Nalanda, he takes with him a large company of monks and gives again a “comprehensive discourse” on morality, concentration,

⁵ The exchange with Ananda in which he chastises him for not picking up the hint that he could have lived to be 100 instead of 80 years (31. – 3.5; 3.40) I find to be absolutely incomprehensible!

and wisdom. Arriving next in Pataligama, with his monk followers, he addresses the lay-followers, who are householders. Rather than the “comprehensive discourse” mentioned above, he points out the advantages of good morality and the disadvantages of bad morality, followed by the oft-repeated, “Now it is time for you to do as you think fit” (1.25). Before the arrival in Kotigama, their next destination, the Buddha and his order of monks come to the River Ganges. While local people were using boats or rafts to get across, the Buddha and his followers vanish and instantly reappear on the other shore, while the Buddha uttered, “When they want to cross the sea, the lake or pond, People make a bridge or raft – the wise have crossed already” (1.34).

This parable of “crossing over,” suggests that the practice of the Buddha’s teaching and the goal of liberation are one and the same. “Crossing over” is not like a reward for a certain set of actions or achievements, but more a shift in perspective and seeing in a new way, presumably in accord with the teaching of morality, concentration, and wisdom, when fully integrated. Since the Buddha does not cross over alone, the belief in this story reveals that the “crossing over” is available to all who truly embrace the Buddha’s teaching. Whether it is available to lay followers and householders in the same way and at the same time as it is to monks is not made clear. But the story indicates that the “crossing over” of the order of monks is displayed before people who are looking for conventional means of crossing, perhaps as another inducement to embrace the teaching.

Arriving in Kotigama, yet another of the so-called “comprehensive discourses” is given to the monks. But unlike the earlier visits to Ambalattthika and Nalanda, the Buddha first reprises the teaching of the Four Noble Truths. He explains that without understanding this bedrock teaching, we continue in the cycle of *samsara*, which means not faring well and suffering. The solution, of course, is to understand the teaching and achieve the cessation of

becomes a kind of lawgiver, like Solon or Lycurgus, whose laws take on a life of their own, thereby surviving the death of the giver. Furthermore, it mitigates reliance on supernatural powers or supernatural insight – the “divine eye” (cf. 1.27) – since each disciple has at his own disposal an accessible means of determining his level of attainment: he need only look into the “Mirror.”

Now that the Buddha has bestowed the gift of the “Mirror”, his final work is nearing completion. Once again, he gives the same “comprehensive discourse” on morality, concentration, and wisdom to the monks before leaving Nadika for Vesali, where he stayed at a grove owned by the courtesan Ambapali. The courtesan invites him and his order of monks for a meal. The Licchavis of Vesali, those mentioned earlier as being excessively attached to material concerns and adornments, compete with Ambapali for the Buddha’s acceptance of a meal, but they are disappointed. On the next day, after the meal provided by Ambapali, she bequeaths her park to the Buddha and the monks (2.19). The Buddha, realizing the selfish, materialistic bent of the Licchavis, may have preferred Ambapali in order to secure a place for the monks to stay in Vesali. Perhaps this was part of the political goal to ensure the continuation of the *sangha*. Afterwards he delighted her with another talk on the *Dhamma*. One wonders whether he repeated the teachings that he gave to the householders of Pataligama, especially the part about being supportive of monks and Brahmins, in order to get Ambapali to donate the land. This speculation makes the Buddha seem very calculating, but such a charge pales in comparison to the importance of the Buddha’s final aim – to secure the *Dhamma* and give it a permanent home in the *sangha*.

After he gives to Ambapali, a non-follower, a talk on the *Dhamma*, he repeats the “comprehensive discourse” for the monks. We see a pattern emerging. The monks continue to

suffering. It is worth noting that verse 2.3 describes the Buddha as “Lord”, “Well-Farer: and “Teacher”. He is “Lord” in the sense of respected master, who has gained enlightenment; “Well-farer” in the sense of one, who, on account of enlightenment, has achieved the cessation of suffering; “Teacher” in the sense of the one who imparts to all humanity the path to the cessation of suffering.⁶

At the next stop in Nadika, Ananda petitions the Buddha regarding the fate of several followers from that town, which the Buddha claims to be wearisome. Instead of simply providing the answer to Ananda, he offers the teaching of the “Mirror of *Dhamma*” (2.8ff.), which I take to be the most important teaching of the Sutta. This will provide the key for each disciple to discern for himself his level of attainment. Such a teaching is crucial to the integrity and independence of the *sangha*. If each member can discern for himself his level of attainment without relying on the “super-knowledge” or the special “Buddha wisdom” of the Buddha himself, then the Buddha is no longer necessary to the survival of the *sangha* or, for that matter, of the *Dhamma*. The “Mirror of *Dhamma*” thereby renders the Buddha dispensable to the goal of spreading the teaching. During his life, the Buddha spoke of taking refuge in the Buddha, the *sangha*, and the *Dhamma*. Now, the latter two will suffice.

And the Lord said to Ananda: Ananda, it may be that you will think: “The Teacher’s instruction has ceased, now we have no teacher!” It should not be seen like this, Ananda, for what I have taught and explained to you as Dhamma and discipline will, at my passing, be your teacher.
(6.1)

Later in the Sutta, the Buddha will instruct the monks in “the four criteria” (4.8 – 4.11), a kind of method by which to consult the “Mirror of *Dhamma*.” Buddha gives instructions for judging the authenticity of the practice. This is crucial for the perpetuation of the teaching. The Buddha

⁶ The same set of epithets is repeated at 4.3.

get the deepest, most profound discourse to secure, and reinforce their practice. To lay followers he gives the address such as the one to the Pataligaman householders, which also encourages them to support the monks. To non-followers, like Ambapali, he gives a talk on the *Dhamma*. Both the householders and Ambapali are said to be “instructed, inspired, fired and delighted” by the *Dhamma* talk (1.25, 2.14, 2.19). The Buddha carefully builds a synergy among his various constituencies so that they become interactive and mutually supportive. He knows which talk to deliver to which group. In this respect he is supremely political.

The Buddha’s next stop in the little village of Beluva proves to be the beginning of the end. He incurs a severe sickness, but manages to hold the illness in check, because he needs to address his followers yet again and officially take his leave. No matter how many times he has repeated the “comprehensive discourse,” as long as he is alive, the monks may still defer to his living authority. He needs to make an official transition and insure that the monks acknowledge the receipt of the *Dhamma*. In fact, Ananda anticipates just such a final statement. He discloses to the Buddha that he feels disoriented at the thought of the Buddha’s death (2.24), which presumably is near at hand after his recent severe illness. Ananda expects a final, revelatory statement from the Buddha that will both console him and the other monks as well as provide the Buddha’s authoritative declaration, but the Buddha insists that he has no such statement.

But, Ananda, what does the order of monks expect of me? I have taught the *Dhamma*, Ananda, making no “inner” and “outer”: the Tathagata has no “teacher’s fist” in respect of doctrines. If there is anyone who thinks: “I shall take charge of the order”, or “The order should refer to me”, let him make some statement about the order, but the Tathagata does not think in such terms. So why should the Tathagata make a statement about the order? (2.25)

The Buddha maintains that there is no hidden teaching or further doctrine left unsaid. The monks have already received everything they need. They have been drilled in the

“comprehensive discourse,” they have been given the “Mirror of Dhamma” and they will be taught the “four criteria”.⁷ It is up to them now to look to themselves.

Therefore, Ananda, you should *live as islands unto yourselves* (my emphasis), being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the *Dhamma* as an island, with the *Dhamma* as your refuge, with no other refuge. (2.26)

“Islands unto yourselves” fortifies the “Mirror of *Dhamma*.” Together they make possible the authentic pursuit of the *Dhamma* without having to resort to any external authority. Each disciple has the means to verify that he is on the right path. This is a further step in reducing the *sangha*’s dependency on the Buddha.

This is also a curious simile. An island is separated from other bodies of land, encircled by water, cut off. This does not seem to be the Buddha’s meaning, especially since he wants to encourage the harmony of the *sangha* as a community. An island is also a refuge from a storm or from the noise and hubbub of the material world. It can be a place of escape. The Buddha’s teaching has provided a place of inner escape, a refuge from the world of agitation and suffering and, at the same time, a place of belonging in the stream of those seeking final liberation. One can be independently self-reliant and a member of a community of fellow strivers. Again, the Buddha has set the stage for his own dispensability.⁸

⁷ I realize that the teaching of the “four criteria” comes after the teaching of “Be an island unto yourselves” in the Sutta, but I don’t think it does violence to my argument to rearrange it to make my point here.

⁸ This whole Sutta 16 puts me very much in mind of Plato’s *Phaedo*, not least the way each ends, but specifically “Live as islands unto yourselves” reminds me very much of the passage, where Simias and Cebes lament the imminent death of Socrates and their anticipation of the fear of death. Socrates says to them that they will have to find another flute player to charm them, that is, provide a kind of balm against the fear. The dialogue makes it clear that they will have to rely on themselves. (Please forgive the rather imprecise reference. My Greek texts are not with me and I’m just working from memory).

Everything the Buddha needed to teach has already been taught. No further verbal statement is needed. Still, there is another kind of statement that the Buddha must make, not in words, but in deeds. He must let the monks see him striving until the last to secure the *sangha* and bequeath the *Dhamma* in order to show one last time how very important his mission seems to him.

Before his departure from Vesali, the Buddha is visited by Mara, the Evil One, who urges him to take his final *Nibbana* now that he has achieved his declared goal. Mara claims to quote the Buddha addressing the Evil One from an earlier meeting:

Evil One, I will not take final *Nibbana* till I have monks and disciples who are accomplished, trained, skilled, learned, knowers of the *Dhamma*, trained in conformity with the *Dhamma*, correctly trained and walking in the path of the *Dhamma*, who will pass on what they have gained from their Teacher, teach it, declare it, establish it, expound it, analyse it, make it clear; till they shall be able by means of the *Dhamma* to refute false teachings that have arisen, and teach the *Dhamma* of wondrous effect.

The Evil One misquotes, or, rather, omits important parts of what the Buddha said. In a later passage (3.35) when the Buddha is conversing with Ananda, he recounts this earlier meeting with the Evil One, and repeats what he said then, which completes what the Evil One omits here. In addition to “monks and disciples” mentioned in the statement above, the Buddha had included nuns, laymen-followers, and laywomen-followers. Furthermore, he had said:

I will not take final *Nibbana* till this holy life has been successfully established and flourishes, is widespread, well-known far and wide, well-proclaimed among mankind everywhere.

Now we see the full-blown political agenda of the Buddha, which is extremely ambitious. His goal is not limited to teaching the *Dhamma* to a group of monks. He wants followers of all sorts, including those who will support the mission of the monks and he wants assurance that

the repository of the *Dhamma*, which is the *sangha*, has been well-established, hence the number of repetitions of the “comprehensive discourse”, which will be repeated even more before the end of the Sutta. The Buddha wants to be sure that the *sangha* is firm, secure, and made up of members who are “islands to themselves,” and who possess the “Mirror of Dhamma,” for the *sangha* is the moving stream of dissemination of the teaching. If the monks and nuns have been well-taught and the lay-followers and householders are well disposed to the monks, then the teaching will live, spread, and fulfill its purpose “that this holy life may endure for a long time, that it may be for the benefit and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit and happiness of devas and humans” (3.50).

The Buddha’s ambition is colossal. Not even the likes of Socrates or Jesus or Confucius or Epicurus or any other great spiritual leader or teacher went to the lengths that the Buddha did to ensure the continuation of his teaching and the spread of the doctrine. This is not to say that other teachings or religions did not surpass Buddhism in their spread and increase, but the spread was not primarily a result of the original founder and teacher as it was in the case of the Buddha. Therefore, Buddha emerges, in addition to everything else, as the most politically determined of all spiritual teachers.

Still suffering from his former illness, with his life quickly ebbing away, the Buddha persists in his final mission, visiting several more towns, giving several more “comprehensive discourses” before coming to his final resting place in Mallas’ sal-grove on the outskirts of Kusinara. Eminently political until the end and aware of the fact that his life is testimony for the faithful to the possibility of reaching *Nibbana*, he instructs Ananda about the importance of four shrines to preserve the memory of the milestones in his life: his birth, his enlightenment, his first sermon, and his death (5.8).

In his final remark to Ananda, the Buddha asserts his confidence in the successful completion of his final work.

... the Tathagata knows that in this assembly there is not one monk who has doubts or uncertainty about the Buddha, the *Dhamma* or the *Sangha* or about the path or the practice. Ananda, the least one of these five hundred monks is a Stream-Winner, incapable of falling into states of woe, certain of *Nibbana*.

His plan is cemented. The political project is achieved. Everything necessary for the perpetuation of his teaching is secured. In his place the Buddha has left a community of trained monks, well-taught and well-practiced in the *Dhamma*, all of whom will contribute to spreading his teaching, because the very activity of disseminating the teaching is part and parcel of the compassion for humanity that seeks to end suffering. The Buddha can die knowing that he has earned his rest and bequeathed peace to future generations.

Part Three: Brief Epilogue

In the contest to see who would get a portion of the Buddha's remains for the purpose of erecting a stupa in his honor after his death and cremation, King Ajatasattu surfaces again among the competitors. The man who killed his own father to gain the throne, who sought out spiritual teachers to bring peace to his heart after the murder, who vowed to become a lay-follower of the Buddha, who subsequently made plans to go to war, who vies for a portion of the Buddha's remains, finally erects a great stupa at Rajagaha, where the Buddha's final journey of ministry began. It seems clear from every indication in the suttas that King Ajatasattu was inferior to the Buddha and regarded himself as subordinate, both from the fact of his becoming a follower and from the need to have the Buddha's sanction for his actions. In this respect, the King has not yet become an "island to himself" nor does he possess the "Mirror of Dhamma."

If the life of the Buddha bears testimony to the power of morality, concentration, and wisdom, the life of King Ajatasattu testifies to the inferiority of worldly power to the Buddha's *Dhamma*.

Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322): *Elegant Rocks and Sparse Trees*

Section of a handscroll, ink on paper, Yuan Dynasty

27.5 x 62.8 cm.

Palace Museum, Beijing

Zhao Mengfu's painting "Elegant Rocks and Sparse Trees" depicts a small cluster of boulders, framed by three trees, fronted by clumps of bamboo. The painting is very spare. Among the boulders is one large rock, centrally located and framed by trees on either side.¹ One senses simplicity, in both the composition and in the execution. There are only three kinds of things depicted: rocks, trees, and bamboo, although the ground is indicated. The centrality of the rocks draws one's attention. One has the sense that the rock in the middle is the largest rock, flanked by two smaller rocks, less than half the height of the large one, but considerably smaller in overall volume. As one looks closer, one sees that the rock on the left is painted with lighter color brushstrokes (see copy [A]), at first suggesting that it stands more distant and back from the larger one in the middle. In this were the case, one could imagine it bigger, and yet a tall bamboo tree appears just behind it, with dark tone, suggesting that, in fact, the rock on the left is more or less in the same plane with the larger one on the right. Were it not for that bamboo and the tree in the middle, one could easily assume the left hand rock to be the largest, since most distant, but in the overall context it forms a cluster with the other two rocks.

In the section of the hand scroll reproduced in the book, the larger rock is slightly offset from the middle, although one cannot know how it appears in the context of the entire scroll. Nevertheless, one has a definite sense of symmetry in the placement of the rocks themselves. Adding to this symmetry are the thin trees, which form a kind of border around the rock formation. They occupy three locations, two on either side of the massive rock and the rock to the left, and one in the middle in the crevice between the larger and smaller of the two central rocks. At first glance, the image appears somewhat two dimensional, as rocks flanked by trees. While there is not much depth, the three dimensionality emerges when one sees that the tree in the center, fainter in color, appears set back, as if the three trees form a kind of triangular border around the

rock formation, which begins to emerge as having three dimensionality, with the largest rock most prominent and most forward, and the other two slightly set back on either side (see copy [C]).

The immediate impression of the rocks is one of ponderous bulk, yet they are sitting apart from any geological formation, which might imply a mountain somewhere in the background, altogether unrepresented, but nevertheless suggested, to account for the source of the rocks. Since the rocks stand apart from any mountain, one gets a sense of scale from the nearby trees and bamboo. Since one cannot imagine the smaller bamboo more than about a foot or two high, the two flanking trees, by comparison are about ten times higher. The tree in the center, farthest back, is the highest, a bit higher than the highest part of the rock. Hence, one imagines the rock to be about five times higher than an average sized person or perhaps about thirty feet high.

While the bamboo has leaves, all but the one tree on the left appear devoid of leaves. It is not easy to discern the season. Since all but one of the trees are without leaves, one might infer late autumn, assuming that the ones without leaves have already lost theirs, and the one with leaves remaining will soon be losing its leaves.

The visual field is stark without great tonal variation. The painting is monochromatic. One would not call the brush strokes delicate, although some of the tree branches and the bamboo are quite fine. There is a kind of rough texture to the entire painting, with alternating dark and light tones between the trees and the rocks. Three vertical characters to the right of the right hand boulder comprise the only writing in the part of the scroll reproduced (see copy [D]). To one who cannot read Chinese they don't look very much like formal characters, but they resemble the strokes used to do parts of the branches. Even if they are actual characters, one assumes that they might be a kind of signature rather than a poem. The numerous chop marks in red provide sharp color contrast with the painting and serve as a color border on right and left. There are thirty-two red marks, so, while not part of the original composition, the addition of the color from the chop marks adds enough color contrast to accentuate the interior composition. The rocks are the most imposing objects. Owing to the fact that the artist has done many earlier paintings with much greater detail, complexity, and

Technique

Zhao Mengfu presents a limited landscape of grass, trees, and rocks. He captures distinct form by means of tonal variation and brush stroke. For the most part the darkest tones represent the bamboo (see copy [E]). The leaves are very similar with virtually the same tonal value. They appear, for the most part, in clumps, whose darkness contrasts with the light shade of the rock behind them. All of the blades of bamboo leaves appear to be achieved with a single, quick, delicate stroke, some with a slight turn at the end to capture the drooping leaf effect. Most have the same shape – narrow, tapering to a point. Perhaps this is meant to capture the remark made by Mi Fei, of the Northern Sung period, about his friend Su Shih (1036-1101), a Taoist painter, “Su Shih painted his bamboos in one stroke from the ground to the top. I asked him why he did not paint them by joints? To which he answered: ‘Do the bamboos ever grow in joints?’”² There is no interior structure. They resemble the kind of bamboo one sees on beaches near the ocean or on the banks of rivers, although there is no suggestion of water in the painting. However, water may be inferred, just as the mountains that may be behind the painted rocks.

The clumps of bamboo are gathered on slight mounds of earth, represented by lines of medial tonality that slightly rise and fall just in front of the two big rocks and behind the right side of the biggest rock in front of the third rock on the right.

For the most part the brush strokes are made with a dry brush that lends itself to capturing the solid, ponderous rocks (see copy [F]). He uses an outline method of painting the rocks (see copy [G]), although the texture of the stroke varies to indicate the rock faces. The same kind of stroke is used to capture the earth surface in which the bamboo grows. The earth, too, has the appearance of dryness, as if one were looking at a beachscape. If one squints while looking at the painting, the faint brush strokes depicting the rock interior disappear and the darker lines of the trees and bamboo look like running calligraphy. Even from a distance the lines in the painting appear calligraphic.

In addition, the outline method of brush strokes gives a ghost-like quality to the painting. The artist is

lighter, vertical strokes imply bulk and dimensionality. In some paintings the brush strokes are so fine and delicate that one loses sight of their presence, as if they simply blend into the objects that they depict. Here, one is acutely aware of the strokes, especially in the rocks. One can feel the stop and start of the dry brush being dragged across the page, leaving parallel lines, clearly indicating that the outline is done in a single stroke, but the effect is one of surface depth, so that the rock faces are delineated.

Perspective and Mood

It is very difficult to describe the perspective in terms of van Briessen's three-fold classification: level distance, deep distance, or high distance. One does not have the sense of traveling through the landscape as is often the case in the earlier Song Dynasty landscapes. Rather one has a kind of face-to-face encounter with a gargantuan boulder. The trees and the bamboo have life, but the boulders dominate the composition, so the focus is rather on something big, ponderous, immovable, and stable rather something changeable and evanescent.

The monochromatic paint and the limited tonal variation allow the substantial, unpainted background to suggest daylight, although just as the season is somewhat ambiguous, so is the time of day. One cannot see anything beyond the images of rocks and trees. The several clumps of bamboo in front of the rock cluster add depth to the overall composition, but there is no hint of sky or water, or, for that matter, misty mountain. There could be any of these in the background. Instead, the background is empty, just as most of the rock face has the same tonal value as the background as does the earth at the bottom of the scroll.

The mood here is bleak, not merely because there are no apparent signs of life besides the trees and the bamboo, but also because there is no motion, with the minor exception of the bent bamboo leaves which could be windblown. The aim seems to be simplicity and the artist reduces things to their most basic elements. The rocks are little more than an outline, the bamboo shows only leaves and no stalks, the trees are mere branches and even the one with leaves lacks tonal variation. This is a ghostly landscape.

One senses that this is a real landscape as opposed to one imagined by the artist, although one that has

left floating, but appear grounded. The artist leaves the surrounding to the imagination of the viewer and yet the background seems not to matter as much as what is present and immediate – big, bulky boulders.

Composition

The most striking thing about this portion of the scroll is its symmetry. There is a triad of rocks balanced by a triad of trees, both in a triangular arrangement. The biggest boulder tilts slightly to the right, while opposed on the left by the tree with the most foliage, which tilts slightly left. Midway between the two trees in the foreground is the highest tree in the background, behind the rocks and separating the two most prominent. Two smaller rocks stand on either side of the central boulder. The two flanking trees mirror one another's gesture, which is curved slightly outward with top branches pointing horizontally away from the center. The bamboo is scattered, mostly in the foreground, with two taller plants in the middle, on either side of the tall tree. The dark leaves of the bamboo contrast with the pale figure of the tree.

If one traces the outline of the boulders, one sees that the dragon veins form a triangle (see copy [H]). This connection is very strong, taking its bearings from the well-grounded, dense boulders. This is the central triad of the entire composition. Likewise, if one connects the tops of the three trees, one sees the same shape. There is even a kind of triangle from the side of the bamboo on the left front to the top of the highest bamboo in the middle back to the bamboo on the right front (see copy [J]). There is a definite sense of triangularity. At the same time, the boulders have rounded, rather than sharp, edges. The inner branches of the two flanking trees curve up and inward, approximating the curve of the boulders. Likewise the tall tree in the middle had its two middle branches opposing one another, loosely following the curve of the boulder (see copy [M]). So the inner branches of the tree suggest arms encircling the rocks (see copy [K]). One might say that the outer branches curving away from the rocks are open, reaching out toward an invisible space, while the opposed branches curving towards the rocks close a space around the rocks (see copy [L]). This is also apparent in the way that the tall tree in the middle opens upward toward the edge of the scroll and closes downward around the rock.

as “hosts” to the upright boulders as “guests” next to them. In a less obvious sense, the tree with leaves on the left, bending slightly to its left, serves as “host” to the tall, straight “guest” tree in the middle. Similarly, the two trees on the right have the smaller of the two bending slightly left (“guest”), while the taller of the two stands straight.

The second most striking thing about the composition is the so-called “heaven” and “earth” relationship. The horizon line, if one can call it that, is less than one-fourth of the way up from the bottom, which means that the “heaven” portion of the painting is immense. To call it “immense”, however, is deceptive, since there is no indication of what lies beyond. From this perspective, one might say that there is no “heaven”, merely “earth”. In other words the focus is not the central composition set against a distant horizon of sky or water or mountains, but rather the central objects planted firmly and solidly on the earth. The artist has clearly left the bulk of the paper unpainted when one considers the untouched background and the mostly unpainted interior of the boulders, as well as the unpainted earth. What distinguishes the earth is a simple light line that runs horizontally from left to right, although broken at one point and continued slightly higher up to indicate some depth. If one thinks of the horizon line to separate the upper from the lower portion of the painting, then one is forced to conclude that the upper portion comprises almost the entire painting. The lower portion is entirely subordinate serving only to provide the foundation for the cluster of boulders. In this sense one might say that the earth plays “host” to the rocks and trees as “guests”.

Reflections on Painting

Zhao Mengfu included in his painting (not shown in the section reprinted) a short poem that sheds light on his subject.

Rocks as in flying white [script], trees as in seal script,
When painting bamboo one applies the spreading-eight [late clerical] method.
Those who understand this thoroughly
Will realize that calligraphy and painting have always been the same.

The rocks are identified with a kind of calligraphy called “flying white” which “owes its name to a special

jumping or leaping on the paper surface without losing contact with it, all executed in one stroke.”³ Cai Yong of the Han Dynasty introduced this style,⁴ which makes it quite old in terms of calligraphic techniques. The artist likens the trees to “seal script”, one of the oldest styles of writing, going back to the Qin Dynasty. Likewise, the “spreading eight” invokes a style of calligraphy that is late clerical, a style that followed the seal script. These three techniques were present roughly a thousand years before Zhao Mengfu and one can easily surmise that his intention is to remind us not only of antiquity but also of endurance. Calligraphy is among the earliest expressions of Chinese art and the piece under consideration wants to recover something of the unity between calligraphy and painting. The ancient ways continue to live in art.

When one thinks of the landscape paintings from the T’ang and Sung dynasties, with mist-shrouded mountains intertwined with bodies of water, connected to forests or shorelines with small monastic retreats, this painting, *Elegant Rocks and Sparse Trees*, seems anomalous in its spare composition, its dry, rough strokes, and the absence of background context. One question that comes to mind is why speak of the rocks as elegant. They are elegant in their simplicity. They contain no vegetation on their surfaces, they do not soar to great heights, but they remain firmly grounded and seem utterly immovable, thereby acquiring a sense of being ancient and unchanging. One wonders if the painter, who came to the Yuan Court, the regal residence of the invading Mongols, is thinking of the ancient tradition of native Chinese, who, despite having been conquered by hordes from the north, will endure and retain their ancestral ways. The conquered have their customs, their history, and their stability, while external invaders come and go. The native Chinese are like the rocks, firm and immovable, while external surrounding trees and vegetations go through their cycles of growth and change. Thus, the rocks take on a symbolic value of patient, unchanging endurance, like the Chinese, who patiently await the removal of their conquerors and a return to the ancestral rule of traditional Chinese dynastic rulers.

The fact that the painting exudes age, endurance, permanence, and unchangeableness is what constitutes its “life” or, in the terms of Hsieh Ho’s six principles, its rhythmic vitality. The life element is not simply the result of depicting organic, living, moving objects, but the authenticity of capturing

something vital. If, as I have suggested above, Zhao Mengfu has symbolically represented the aesthetic spirit of the native Chinese and their firm endurance under the presumed temporary rule of the Mongol invaders, by means of these ponderous, ancient-looking rocks, then the painting has life. As to the other five principles, one sees the skeletal structure of the brushwork, evident in the bone-like, outline of the rocks. The brush strokes, as mentioned earlier, appear very calligraphic. The objects conform to nature in their internal relations. The three objects depicted have organic unity. Trees, bamboo, and rocks are natural neighbors. Excluding the chop marks, no coloring is involved, although the use of light and dark tones expresses the depth of the composition, the rock faces, and the rock textures.

Regarding the sixth principle of Hsieh Ho, "the drawing should be guided by former masters," Zhao Mengfu employs well-known techniques of previous eras as indicated in his poem, where he names "flying white," "seal script," and "spreading eight." While continuing techniques that were introduced by others, it is tempting to think of Zhao Mengfu as serving as a new master for successive generations of painters insofar as he reduces technique and composition to their most basic means of expression, primarily for symbolic purposes, as I have suggested. One need only compare this to his successor, Ni Zan (1301-1374), whose painting *Autumn Wind in Gemstone Trees* resembles the composition of Zhao Mengfu's *Elegant Rocks*. There are general similarities in the relationship of the central rock to the surrounding trees, in the relation of earth and sky with the largely unpainted background, in the fact that the perspective is much like *Elegant Rocks*, appearing at first very two dimensional. It has its own simplicity and it appropriates the compositional objects of Zhao Mengfu, employing rock, tree, and bamboo. Despite these compositional similarities, the two paintings are quite different in tone, in mood, in style, and in intent. The brush strokes of Ni Zan are far more delicate and refined, lacking the rough-hewn look of *Elegant Rocks*. There is far more growth on the trees and bamboo, almost to the point of obscuring the rock hiding behind them. Furthermore, there is considerably more calligraphic writing, although that may have been added later. Interestingly, the refined style of calligraphy very much matches the delicate, sharp, uniform bamboo leaves. The fact

Hsieh Ho's third principle of conformity with nature and has a certain aesthetic charm and decorative appeal, but it lacks the vitality of Zhao Mengfu's ponderous, immovable boulders. One enjoys looking at the thin bamboo stalks of Ni Zan's painting, almost forming a canopy along with the larger tree over the lone rock, dwarfed by the trees. The appeal is in the trees, not the rock. In this respect, it is entirely unlike Zhao Mengfu's *Elegant Rocks*, whose rocks in all of their primitive bulk assume pride of place.

Primitive is a good word to describe Zhao Mengfu's painting. Rough, dry brush strokes, little tonal variation, clumps of bamboo without well-delineated leaves – it's neither delicate nor charming. It doesn't reveal itself at first glance, as does the Ni Zan painting. One might say that it is restrained, not calling attention to itself. Yet, despite its rough, primitive appearance, there is no doubt about what is depicted. As soon as one identifies the objects, one wonders why they are presented in such a rough-hewn manner. It is precisely in this invitation to investigate the relationship between style and composition that one begins to plumb the inner story, or so I would like to believe.



17) Zhao Mengfu, *Elegant Rocks and Sporn Trees*, section of a handscroll, ink on paper, Yuan dynasty, 27.1 X 62.8 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Zhao the master calligrapher, but Zhao the highly accomplished painter, not the "calligraphic" brushstrokes in themselves but the way they are made to function representationally. Broad, broken strokes (the "flying white") shape the rocks and give them surface roughness and volume; firm, blunt strokes in black ink (the "real script") convey the stiffness of the branches and twigs of trees; piky clumps of tapered strokes (the "late clerical" script) writing bamboo, painting orchids is called writing or-

chids." Tang goes on to quote a line from a Song-period poet: "If the idea is adequate, do not seek for outward likeness."¹¹ But this association of "capturing the idea" with the spontaneous ink monochrome mode of painting and "seeking for outward likeness" with the careful, conservative styles is also of limited validity; it would be difficult to argue that Li Kan's painting (see fig. 172) is less successful in conveying the "idea" or the "principle"

of bamboo than Zhao Mengfu's. The visual excitement generated in the viewer by a painting like Zhao's comes from the experience of reading the brushstrokes simultaneously as elements of an image and as expressive traces of the artist's hand.

Another leading bamboo painter of the time was Zhao Mengfu's wife, Guan Daosheng (1262-1319). The daughter of an old Wuxing family and well educated, she

Tamakazura: The Wild Carnation in *The Tale of Genji*

The Tale of Genji is redolent with the fragrance of flowers, imbued with the scent of perfume, saturated in the damp of the morning dew, shrouded in autumn mists. Sights and sounds yield in the descriptive narrative to smells and the feel of seasonal change. Lady Murasaki summons the senses on almost every page, not at all to seduce or titillate the reader, but to bring us into the world of the refined aesthetic sensibilities of the characters and to thereby see their world from the inside out. This is a world in which moods shift with the seasons, pleasures are heightened by the scent on a perfumed note, clothing is left to marinate in the smell of an incense-laden room, layers of richly colored robes are worn for the heightened visual effect.

As we enter this aesthetic world, we are introduced to characters without conventional names, often identified by rank, social standing, or royal birth. Quite often women are associated with a type of flower, either as a means of identification, as for example in the case of the lady of the orange blossoms, or as a metaphorical marker, as in the case of lavender in reference to the young Murasaki (108), as an indication of the woman's personality or a portent of her future.

The aesthetic appreciation of a beautiful flower or, for that matter, a season, morning dew, autumn mist, or a moonlit night is inextricably linked with a sense of sadness and longing in the awareness of its passage. So often the author remarks on a thing of extreme beauty, frequently of Genji himself, that owing to its beauty, it is not long for this world, as if the things of beauty among all ephemeral objects are those most destined to be short-lived. There is no particular reason why this should be the case. The ugly perishes equally with the comely. Perhaps it is owing to the brilliance with which beauty shines amid less lustrous objects that makes us notice its passing all the more. Hence, the main character's epithet, "the shining Genji."

In the grand scheme of things life and death are two facets of one whole, so if our authoress chooses to dwell on the waning beauties of nature, there must be, even if not the center of attention, the complementary waxing of life and growth. In this novel the mention of 'wild carnations' plays

precisely that role. Whereas cherry blossoms are almost always noted for their short-lived blazing beauty, and thus become a metaphor for the evanescence of things, wild carnations, by contrast, appear hardy, resilient, and durable. Perhaps their vitality is owing to their wildness unlike those flowers and shrubs cultivated to adorn a garden. Implied is a kind of natural hardiness, combined with being untamed, something not in need of human nurturing. If these floral associations can be carried over to specific characters in the novel, the one character most deeply associated with wild carnations is Tamakazura.

Mention of 'wild carnations' occurs on thirteen different pages, sometimes more than once, including Chapter Twenty-Six, which goes by that title. Almost half of these, including the chapter entitled "Wild Carnations" make direct or indirect reference to Tamakazura. The very first mention occurs in Chapter Two, "The Broom Tree," as To No Chujo recounts a secret romance from his past that issued in a female child. (The ill-fated woman of this entanglement turns out to be the Lady of the Evening Faces, who dies, or is murdered, depending on how one interprets the spirit possession by the Rukou Lady, shortly after her romantic encounter with Genji.) The worried mother sends a letter to To No Chujo "attached to a wild carnation" with an accompanying poem:

"The fence of the mountain rustic may fall to the ground.
Rest gently, O dew, upon the wild carnation." (37)

To No Chujo responds with a verse in which he claims that "the dearest of all to me is the wild carnation," although he goes on to clarify to the listeners to whom he is recounting the story that, while he regards the lady as his wild carnation, she thinks of her child in that way. The woman's poem, an invocation of sorts on behalf of her daughter, bears this out. Metaphorically three things are implied by the association of the daughter with the wild carnation. First, a wild flower is untended. The mountain rustic puts up a fence, presumably to protect and separate off something that he claims for himself, but despite his efforts, the fence may fall. Human efforts, stemming from a desire to possess for oneself, are thwarted by the ineluctable decay that comes with time. By contrast a wild flower is unprotected and unfenced. In this respect it is free and unrestricted.

Second, the flower is unclaimed. Existing wild, it is not something privately possessed, as for example a rose garden, whose flowers become adornments for table or lapel. Third, being wild, the flower is untamed in the sense of being untrained, as one might train a vine to grow along a fence. That is, it is governed by its own internal natural inclinations, not bent to the will of another. For all its being untended, left to fend for itself, it relies on its own resources and becomes that much more hearty. Despite these attributes, the mother, knowing the unpredictability of nature, prays for gentleness to descend on the flower, like the unseen hand of grace.

The woman's response to To No Chujo mentions wild carnations for the last time in this exchange:

“Dew wets the sleeve that brushes the wild carnation.
The tempest rages. Now comes autumn too.” (38)

Wet sleeves are a common occurrence in the novel, the result of a flood of tears betokening the sorrow in human life, often from an unrequited love. Her child, the offspring of a fleeting encounter, evokes pity in the realization that her princely father, who could have afforded her the finest upbringing, will be absent from her life, leaving her to fend for herself. Looking ahead, then, the mother feels a sense of foreboding for her daughter's future and expresses it as a “tempest” followed by autumn, a season of dark, ominous skies, mists, and raging winds.

To No Chujo says of the mother, “she was, I fear, not the sort of woman one finds it possible to keep for very long” (38), despite the fact that, as we learn later, he had been seeing her for three years (84). He excuses himself for his neglect by blaming the woman for not being more assertive and demanding in their relationship. Genji, who suspects that the Lady of the Evening Faces is the “wild carnation” alluded to by To No Chujo in the story told in Chapter Two, assumes that he had abandoned the woman rather than vice versa. By contrast “Genji himself would not be guilty of such negligence” (70). To No Chujo admits to having lost track of his daughter, thereby fulfilling the mother's poetic prophecy.

The prospects for a child of such a romance in a world such as this are generally not good. A girl without a father or extended family to see to her welfare generally ends cut off from society

and favorable wedding opportunities. Indeed, we don't hear about this child until twenty chapters hence, when she is found, by chance, living in the country in happy, but modest circumstances.

If the metaphorical use of wild carnations is an apt fit for the character of Tamakazura, then it remains to show how the course of her life displays the qualities of being untended, untamed, and free. These, I believe, fit very well with her rural upbringing, her resistance to the persistent attempts by Genji to have his way with her, and her eventual self-determined marriage to Prince Hige-kuro.

At the time of the death of the Lady of the Evening Faces, Genji learns from her attendant, Ukon, the facts concerning her affair with To No Chujo and the birth of Tamakazura. Genji brings Ukon to the Nijo Palace to live out of his concern for her welfare, (admittedly in a room near his own (83ff), while offering to take in the orphaned child, but for some reason he does not pursue this course of action and, furthermore, he decides not to tell To No Chujo about his involvement with the Lady of the Evening Faces and her untimely death, nor does he mention his knowledge of the little girl. "He longed to tell his friend that the 'wild carnation' was alive and well; but there was no point in calling forth reproaches" (88). The plight of the girl remains a mystery to Genji and to Ukon, as did the death of her mother to the little girl, until a chance encounter that occurs almost twenty years later.

Tamakazura had been raised by her nurse and the nurse's daughter as the grandchild of the nurse's husband who had been made Viceroy of Kyushu and then moved with the family to the remote region of Hizen, a country province far from the city. Upon his death he had instructed his three sons to see that Tamakazura was returned to the city, knowing that her best prospects were to be returned to her real father, To No Chujo. Their plan was interrupted when they were forced to leave Hizen hurriedly to escape an undesirable suitor, and their destination became the Japanese shrine at Hatsuse. This required that the party, including the now twenty-year-old Tamakazura, walk for four days, although she was entirely unaccustomed to such activity. The fact of her arriving there, admittedly with sore feet, testifies to her pluck and determination. At Hatsuse the reunion with Ukon, still mourning the death of the girl's mother, occurs.

When the incident is reported to Genji, he immediately arranges for the girl to take up residence in his Rokujo mansion in the apartments of the Orange Blossom lady. Genji declines to tell To No Chujo, who by now has many children of his own, while Genji himself has few. In fact, at this point he has only one daughter. The girl, said to be the equal of Murasaki in beauty, expresses surprise that she is being asked to live with a stranger rather than her real father (425).

By now Genji has all of his ladies, Murasaki, Akashi, Orange Blossoms, and Akikonomu installed in the Rokujo mansion, and the Safflower Lady comfortably situated at the old Nijo apartments. Bringing in Tamakazura called forth rumors of a new lady in residence and it was not long before she had many suitors, among whom were the sons of To No Chujo, unaware of their blood relationship. For his part Genji carried on the pretense of being her father, a role that included arranging for a suitable marriage. He actively encourages her to consider two promising suitors, his brother, Prince Hotaru, and General Hige-kuro. Yet, just as his paternal interest in directing her love life becomes active, the better angels of Genji's nature beat a hasty retreat as he "was beginning to think that she was too good to let go" (446).

From this point on Tamakazura's life becomes very complicated owing to Genji's excessive attention, often advanced as his so-called foster parenting (447). He finds her beautiful, charming, and a reminder of her mother, the Lady of the Evening Faces, for whom Genji still mourns. He becomes so enamored of his 'foster-daughter' that he persuades himself, and tries to persuade her, that she should accept him in a new way, because he would be better for her than any of the other suitors, a suggestion that evinces the comment, "It all seemed rather beyond the call of paternal duty" (449).

Genji summons all of his passionate charm to seduce Tamakazura, even to the point of throwing off his robe and pulling her down next to him (450), a move that hitherto had proven irresistible. Surprisingly she manages to reject his suit, despite her inexperience. She even considers accepting the proposal of Prince Hotaru as a means of circumventing Genji, although one wonders why such a ploy would be any more a deterrent than the fact that his continued attention toward Tamakazura might upset Murasaki, whom he truly loves. Undaunted, he persists with a

flood of letters that drives her to her sick bed. In a more playful exchange over the value of reading illustrated romances, which Genji at first criticizes, he concedes that they might be of some value. Considering her upbringing, this may be her very first exposure to human romance, albeit vicarious, with the exception of Genji's unwanted advances. Genji remarks that in all of them there is no daughter "so unfilial" as Tamakazura (460) to which she deftly replies that she has never found anyone "quite so unparental" (460). Her natural sense of wit and self-assurance are on display, effectively chastening Genji. While he may have experienced the sting of rejection in his youth from the Locust Shell Lady, no woman since had managed to resist his more mature and practiced advances until Tamakazura despite her inexperience and her unworldly upbringing.

For all intents and purposes Tamakazura was an orphan after the death of her mother. We know very little of her upbringing during those years living with her adoptive country family, where she spent roughly sixteen of her 20 twenty years prior to her "adoption" by Genji, but we can infer that she did not receive the normal education and cultural training given to a child raised among the world of emperors and princes. While treated with a certain amount of deference by those who took her in, she is not, in fact, raised as anyone's daughter. She arrives under Genji's tutelage without the benefit of knowing precisely what is expected of a daughter, especially the daughter of one of the most powerful state ministers. Straightaway, she is subjected to Genji's irrepressible romantic urges without the benefit of knowledge of courtly etiquette nor worldly experience. Nevertheless, she has by virtue of her nature, an inner resolve that cautions her against what appears to be (and, indeed, is) outrageous behavior on the part of her foster father and thwarts his advances with the kind of grace that neither rankles nor offends, thus maintaining the best of their relationship.

From the very beginning Genji had suspected To No Chujo as the father of Tamakazura and when the latter abandoned the Evening Faces lady, Genji made a sincere offer to adopt the daughter, although her whereabouts were unknown at that time. Whatever his original motives were in adopting Tamakazura, they seem to have undergone a change as Genji learns to appreciate her beauty and grace. In addition, he plays a cunning game with To No Chujo by withholding

knowledge of Tamakazura, whom he knows would be welcome as a long-lost daughter by her father.

Genji was sure that Tamakazura would be received courteously and properly honored if To No Chujo were to learn of her presence. . . . he would not turn away the daughter who suddenly presented herself to him. He was certain to treat her with the most scrupulous ceremony. (465)

Nevertheless, he not only continues the deception, but he encourages Tamakazura to “come out toward the veranda just a little” (465) knowing that To No Chujo’s sons are keen on seeking introductions to the new lady of mystery in the Genji household.

He had avoided showy plantings in this northeast quarter, but the choicest of *wild carnations* (my emphasis) caught the evening light beneath low, elegant Chinese and Japanese fences. The young men seemed very eager to step down and pluck them (and the flower within as well).

With the exception of the first mention of her in the mother’s poem after her birth, we have here perhaps the clearest association of Tamakazura with ‘wild carnations,’ as the flower that most prominently receives the young men’s attention and as the “flower within.”

Genji continues to be ambivalent in his attitude toward Tamakazura, alternating between lascivious thoughts of conquest even should she marry and the clear realization that she would never rival Murasaki for his devotion. Under the circumstances the best thing would be to marry her to Prince Hotaru or General Hige-kuro (469). All the while Tamakazura experiences deep despair over Genji’s overt expressions of affection, merely a pastime for him, and a longing to be taken to her real father, To No Chujo, whom she expects to be a source of protection. Whether intended or rather in spite of his philandering nature, Genji manages to ameliorate their relationship through koto music, which he insists that she practice, since for him music is an indispensable part of cultural refinement. “And so the Japanese koto brought her close to him when other devices had failed” (468). Genji has so many weapons at his disposal to charm women through his refined aesthetic palette that even when direct assault proves futile he gains a victory through stealth.

Is Genji withholding Tamakazura from To No Chujo because of their long-standing rivalry or because he thinks he can better serve the girl’s interests? It’s hard to know. Perhaps it is a bit

of both. We know that the daughter of To No Chujo that went to court did not fare particularly well. And the recovered daughter from Omi became a bit of an embarrassment, so Genji has every reason to assume that he can offer her the best prospects for a happy future. Genji, in fact, comments on the public reception of the Omi daughter and infers that To No Chujo did little in the way of reconnaissance before bringing her to court and Tamakazura gradually accepts the fact that she was better off remaining with Genji then suddenly showing up in To No Chujo's life, where she may have met with a similar reception to the Omi daughter's (478). By contrast Genji can take considerable credit for Murasaki's cultural refinement, and his daughter by the Akashi lady, whose "very liberal sort of education" (471) he carefully orchestrated, will soon be going to court at the request of the crown prince. As well, one can credit him with helping Akikonomu become empress, all of which gives him rather sterling credentials as one who can help young ladies get ahead in the world.

Yet, credit cannot go to Genji entirely. Tamakazura has employed determined resistance and resilience against the most versatile seducer in Heian history and remained on intimate terms – no mean feat. Somehow, it is Tamakazura who tames Genji rather than the other way around and while continuing to visit her regularly, principally to continue the music lessons, he had become "genuinely fond" (478) of her without making any demands. Hence, he had inadvertently smoothed the way for her to seek out her own marriage partner.

The way for Tamakazura is not without pitfalls. While more relaxed toward Genji, she still has a degree of apprehension simply owing to Genji's persistence and long history of conquests. She does not know her real father and cannot count on him as an ally. Once the truth of her parentage becomes known, the sons of To No Chujo give up their pursuit of her only to be replaced by Yugiri, who suddenly declares his ardor for her (509-10) while simultaneously delivering a message regarding the emperor, who wants her among his ladies at court under the pretext of becoming the "wardress of the ladies' apartments" (507). All the while both Prince Hotaru and General Higeokoru have continued their petitions for marriage. Has any woman from humbler

beginnings been more besieged by powerful male interests? Nevertheless, Tamakazura makes plain that she is master of her own destiny, at least as much as one can be in these circumstances.

Since the Ninth Month would not be propitious for her court debut, a date in the Tenth Month was fixed upon. The emperor was very impatient and her suitors were beside themselves. Tearfully, they besought their intermediaries to forestall the event. They might as well have requested the damming of Yoshino Falls. Word came back that the prospect was next to hopeless. (512)

Even against the wishes of an emperor, Tamakazura displays a spirit of independence that sets her apart from others in resisting his “request” that she come to court. In part it may be owing to the fact that she has grown up in the country, which may contribute to her characteristic strength and her unspoiled nature. It may also be owing to not having had a real father, who, at critical junctures like these, might have insisted on her following protocol rather than her own headstrong will. All the while Yugiri slyly presses his suit while acting as a messenger for his father, but finds himself delicately rebuffed by the sudden onset of illness that get in the way of a more direct confrontation, which he would have preferred (512ff). As with Genji, Tamakazura gracefully keeps Yugiri at arm’s length, while managing not to incur his anger or his jealousy and, consequently, she incurs no lasting enmity. In fact, she retains him as an ally.¹ For his part Genji does not favor Hige-kuro as a suitor, but he is not insistent. Thus, it is left to Tamakazura to make critical choices about her future and one might say that, like a skillful juggler, she placates the emperor, Yugiri, Hotaru, and Hige-kuro, keeping four balls in the air at once. Her social dexterity does not go unnoticed. “[B]oth ministers, her real father and her foster father, thought her behavior a model which other ladies would do well to imitate” (516).²

¹ We learn somewhat later that “Tamakazura still felt closer to Yugiri than to her brothers and sisters” (624). Later, after Genji’s death, Yugiri was as friendly and considerate as a brother could possibly have been. He lost no opportunity to call on her or to write to her (806).

² After choosing Hige-kuro, Genji does remark, “Tamakazura has always been an unmanageable young lady, and now she has won me the emperor’s displeasure” (530), although one must take into consideration that he is talking to Murasaki and it would not be in his interest to overemphasize his relationship with Tamakazura.

Even so, Tamakazura does not find perfect happiness when she finally accepts Higeekuro as a husband, even though he is “delirious with joy” (518) at his good fortune. Tamakazura, by contrast, shows no sign of joy and withdraws “into a brooding silence” (518).

Why, then, does Tamakazura choose Higeekuro, who “had not been her first choice” (518). Was her real preference for Prince Hotaru? One is never quite sure and is therefore led to ask what the best choice would have been, given her circumstances. The relationship with Genji is far too complicated, given his bond with Murasaki, not to mention the host of other women in the Rokujo mansion and her relationship to To No Chujo, to consider Genji as a serious prospective husband. Yugiri does not interest her either as a marital partner. She finds the emperor “rather a nuisance” (516). The only other realistic choice would have been Prince Hotaru to whom she showed more regard than to Higeekuro. Perhaps if one married only for love or the prospect of love a marriage with Hotaru might have proved happier. However, Hotaru comes unattached and free to exercise his power and prestige to mold his new wife to his own desire, a potential assault on her independence. Higeekuro by contrast has a wife whom he did not favor as well as children. He is so smitten by Tamakazura that he may well represent her best chance at retaining her autonomy, which is not to say that she aims at dominating him, but she may well realize that she has him wrapped around her little finger. For someone with Tamakazura’s spirit, this is of considerable importance.

With all of this in mind we can now say that from the time that she becomes the ward of Genji, Tamakazura, despite the limitations imposed by gender and custom, displays considerable, poise, grace, and above all, self-determination. Indeed, of all of the characters encountered in the novel, Tamakazura is the freest. In the course of resisting attempts by others to tame her, she tames them. The emperor wistfully accepts her rejection of him and Genji finally reconciles himself to “the plain facts, that the lady was not a proper object of his affections” (535). Yet, Tamakazura has matured and truly assumed the role of daughter to Genji, while learning to appreciate his kindness without holding against him his misguided affection toward her.

We have only to consider Tamakazura as mother to trace the full trajectory of her life. She has two sons in close succession and introduces them to Genji at his fortieth birthday celebration, where Genji receives her warmly and they end up playing music together. “Tamakazura was very much the matron, in an entirely pleasant way” (582) and her relationship with Genji had deepened “and her gratitude increased as the years went by” (584). Sometime after Genji’s death, she too is widowed, left with three sons and two daughters to fend for, who would normally be disadvantaged without the support of a father (806). Of her sons, the oldest, about twenty-eight years old, is a guards captain, soon to be promoted to guards commander. The middle son is a moderator, and the youngest goes from chamberlain to guards captain. All three are said to be “doing rather well” (831), a tribute to their mother’s guidance. As to her daughters, the oldest, after much interest from a variety of suitors, is given to the now-retired Reizei emperor, with whom she has a daughter and a son. The youngest accepts the current emperor’s invitation to come to his court. Although Tamakazura is put under considerable pressure from the court, from the retired emperor and from her sons to make the “right” choice, one can never be quite sure what the right choice is or who might take offense at not being chosen. Perhaps, out of remembrance for having rejecting him herself long ago, Tamakazura decides to send her oldest daughter to the Reizei emperor, but once the daughter produces offspring, she comes into competition with Tamakazura’s sister, who had been with the Reizei emperor longer. This competition leads to some unhappiness for Tamakazura’s oldest daughter much as Kokiden long ago threatened trouble to anyone who stood in the way of her son’s ascent to crown prince. Given the variables at work in any marriage alliance at this level, a “perfect” choice is impossible. Perhaps most telling is that the choice was made by Tamakazura, who acquits herself quite well in terms of her parental duties and has sons to look after her and grandchildren to dote on in her final years. What more could any parent in these times ask for?

We don’t learn Tamakazura’s exact age, but we are told that her oldest son is twenty-eight, which means that she must be in the neighborhood of fifty at this point, at least a decade older than Murasaki when she died. Even Genji thought of retreating from life by age forty. After five

children, "Tamakazura did not look old enough to have such fine sons. Indeed she still seemed in the first blush of maidenhood, not at all different from the girl the Reizei emperor had known" (815). For all of the challenges that she faced as orphan, as adoptive daughter to Genji, as sought after marriage partner, as wife, and finally as widowed mother of five, she continues to express vitality, freshness, and life force like a 'wild carnation' still in full bloom. Whereas some of the characters in similar situations resort to flight from troubles and seek the secluded life of a nun, as for example in the case of Genji's wife, the Third Princess, Tamakazura entertains the idea momentarily, but is coaxed by her sons to see to her daughters' futures (826-27). While the path of Buddhist renunciation is ever present in the background of the novel, a path taken by a few of the characters such as the Eighth Prince, there is a definite anti-Buddhist spirit present in the character of Tamakazura, whose strong sense of self-identity and independence runs counter to the Buddhist ideal of no self. No doubt Tamakazura's rise in the inner circles of courtly life owed a great deal to her association with Genji, but no female character in the novel shows more self-reliance and independence of spirit, which redound all the more to her credit considering her 'wild' and humble beginnings.