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Eastern Philosophy

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An Answer to the Question “What is Daoism?”

The philosophies of Daoism were popularized by the ancient sages Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu, more so by the latter because Chuang Tzu focused highly on the idea of fixation and affirmation, two large parts of the human condition. Chuang Tzu, while was not a fan of language as a notion, he did create the concept word: *tong*, which is one of the many names included in the heart of Daoism.

The concept of *tong*, as Chuang Tzu explained across many of his fables, means ‘throughness’ or ‘to move through.’ The major doctrine is the *Dao*, which mean ‘the Path’ or ‘the path of life and nature’ and fixation is what curbs us from following this path. Chuang Tzu’s theory on the relationship between fixation and affirmation is that without fixation and with affirmation, that is how an individual can become one with nature and community.

There is a Daoist saying that goes, “thing things without being thinged by things.” The first part (thing things) means to utilize things as they are meant to be utilized, or at least as close to nature as one can go by no changing them. The second part (without being thinged by things) conveys not to fixate on the thing itself. To become fixated, as Chuang Tzu urged, is to put one’s self into a bubble of alienation. With high focus set onto one or a few things, this creates a halt to following the path of life and a stop to moving *through* life without disruption.

Chuang Tzu is a sage that came after the other founder of Daoism, Lao Tzu, and expanded the philosophy to an easier and more digestible way to understand the philosophy and this was through with poetic moral tales of animals and princes. Lao Tzu would not disagree with the way Chuang Tzu developed Daoism, particularly with *tong*, because Lao Tzu highly focused on the *Dao*, the Path, as well as *wu*, the nothingness. The term *tong* is Chuang Tzu's way of creating a visualization of the way one can move through the path, which is through the nothingness. Just as water moves through a river and down its path; the water cannot go through the rocks, it has to go around the rock to move past it. The rock is a tangible something something that blocks the water from moving through it, water cannot go through rocks. The nothingness around the rock is the only way to move forward and down the path. Just as fixation becomes a tangible something that blocks us from moving through, it takes away the nothingness that allows us to move through the path with ease.

Affirmation is Chuang Tzu's guide to ending fixation because to affirm to one's self that everything is okay is the first step to not being fixed to something. Affirm what life is and to let everything else go, to let it move *through* one's self. A fixation is parallel to an addiction and can lead to a very unsatisfied lifestyle. Chuang Tzu's famous example is knowledge: knowledge is infinite and humans are limited. If a man becomes fixated on learning all knowledge, he will never be satisfied because there is vastly more knowledge to be learned than what he can fit into one man's lifetime. Affirming to himself this as fact, and to move *through* it as a fact, then he would be able to learn what he can in his time and be satisfied with it.

There seems to be an epidemic of fixation from what I have seen in the world around me; these fixations are obvious when it comes to hard drugs or alcohol like we were warned about in

grade school, but the larger problem of fixation today is the addictions that we were not warned of. Addictions are chemical imbalances inside of us, where our brains crave whatever it is that gives it such satisfaction, whether or not it impairs the body or the being. Modern research shows that nearly all things cause these surges of satisfaction that our brains want again and again, and by nearly all things, this includes games, video games, social media, and socialization. These four things are items every person partakes in and has the potential to become fixated to.

One reason why Daoism is a crucial philosophy to the modern age is the fact that seemingly no human (that I have seen) today has affirmation in their convictions. I see people every day using their technology while falling into the well of fixation by the technology, all without life satisfaction and they wonder why this is. If more individuals realize this fixation and want to change, namely their own, they may not be aware of Chuang Tzu and his answer but they will eventually find that the key is saying “this is what it is and I’ll let it pass” because affirmation and *tong* are not far from the only answer to fixing fixation.