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Taoism and Anarchy

Mark Gillespie

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I have studied many religions in my search for truth. In my searches, I embraced a few. I was a nominal Christian for many years and converted to Islam about six years ago. Of course, I have left all of those religions behind, in my never-ending quest for truth. However, there is one "religion" that I studied that seemed to contain more truth than any other. That way is Taoism.

Now, I won't go deep into the history of Taoism, as that would take too much time. However, a brief summary of Taoist History can be found here. According to history, a man named Lao Tzu, who lived around 600 BCE, founded Taoism. He is the author of a treatise called Tao Te Ching (Daodejing). This translates roughly into English as, "The Book of The Natural Way and of Natural Virtues." Anyone who reads this text will find it to be shockingly forward and uncompromising. Lao Tzu treats the subject with the levity and seriousness it deserves.

I will attempt to show how philosophical Taoism (as opposed to religious Taoism) jibes with Anarchism. I also encourage you to study Taoism in greater detail for yourselves, in accordance with the caveat, "The Way that you attempt to describe isn't the Natural Way . The name you give it isn't its name."

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<http://www.strike-the-root.com/3/gillespie/gillespie1.html>

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To begin with, Anarchy and Taoism share a central premise. This premise is that only natural, uncoerced and voluntary action is acceptable. Both Anarchy and Taoism realize that any restriction to this process creates the seeds for disorder and chaos. As anarchists, we struggle every day against the idea that "Might makes Right." Whenever force is involved, that force carries with it the seeds of its own destruction.

This idea is integral to our understanding of how Anarchy can come about. It cannot come about by being elected to public office and ordering everyone to be free, and it cannot come about by violent revolution. The Tao says about this subject:

Weapons are meant for destruction,
and thus are avoided by the wise. Only as a last resort will a wise person use a deadly weapon. If peace is the true objective how can one rejoice in the victory of war? Those who rejoice in victory take pleasure in murder. Those who resort to violence
will never bring peace to the world.

We know that initiating violence only increases it, and increasing peace increases peace. However, Lao Tzu wasn't foolish. It is natural for any animal in nature to seek to protect its own life. A squirrel is harmless, until you attempt to capture or corner it. Then it will lash out with claw and teeth, in an attempt to be free. This brings us to the second premise that Anarchy and Taoism shares.

The second premise is that everyone has a right to defend their ability to live. Taoism equates natural and voluntary action with the best life. One has life, only to the degree that they may freely **act**. Putting liberty and life together has been a cornerstone of "liberationists" of every stripe. One is only alive when one is free. The Tao says:

The more prohibitions there are,
the poorer everyone will be. The more weapons are used, the greater the chaos will be in society. The more that people seek "knowledge" for its own sake, the stranger the world will become. The more laws that are made,

the greater the number of criminals.

It also gives us the cure for all of these ailments in the next verse.

Therefore the wise person says:

I do nothing, and people become good by themselves. I seek peace, and people take care of their own problems. I do not meddle in their personal lives, and the people become prosperous. I let go of all my desire to control them,

and the people return to their natural ways.

The Tao Te Ching is very much based in observable reality. Lao Tzu observed his society and noticed different things that caused troubles. He mentioned that,

The highest good is not to seek to do good,

but to allow yourself to become good. The ordinary person seeks to do good things,

and finds that they cannot do them continually.

The wise person does not force virtue on others,

and thus is able to accomplish their task. The ordinary person who uses force,

will find that they accomplish nothing.

The kind person acts from the heart,

and accomplishes a multitude of things. The righteous person acts out of pity, yet leaves many things undone. The moral person will act out of duty, and when no one will respond will roll up his sleeves and uses force.

When people cease acting in a natural way, they create "righteousness."

When righteousness is forgotten, they create morality. When morality is forgotten, they create laws. The law is the husk of faith, and trust is the beginning of chaos.

Our basic understandings are not from the Natural Way of Life because they come from the depths of our misunderstanding that way. The wise person abides in the fruit and not in the husk. They live in a natural way, and not behind the things that hide it.

This is how one becomes wiser.

This is the third premise that Taoism and Anarchism share. The premise that all of the states' constructs are shoddy replacements for what would occur if we were free to act. We cannot be charitable when the state takes our "surplus." We cannot share when the state steals from us to give to someone else. We cannot be peaceable when the state prevents us from protecting our own lives. We cannot learn how to interact with each other when the "law" gets in the way. In short, the state and any other force wielding organization cannot deliver what they promise. This much should be obvious to all. We can be more generous, sharing, and caring by being allowed to do so. Until everyone realizes that, we will never have the prosperity, peace and freedom that we could have.

By focusing upon total liberty, protection of life and free association, Anarchy is unique among all political philosophies. As a matter of fact, I would posit that politics is unnatural. So, Anarchism stands tall as the natural, non-political way to freedom and abundant life.

In conclusion, if there ever were a philosophy that shared so much with our anarchist worldview, that philosophy would be Taoism. As a matter of fact, I would go as far as to say that Taoism and Anarchy are nearly the same, in their basic essentials. Yes, due to differences in translation, anyone could utilize the Tao Te Ching to support everything from Anarchism to Statism. But that is the beauty of the text. It encourages one to seek to understand the truth for himself, and that is anarchy in action, is it not? So, the next time you see a copy of the Tao Te Ching on the internet or at the bookstore, take a closer look and know that you haven't been the only one to "get it." Lao Tzu got it a long time ago.