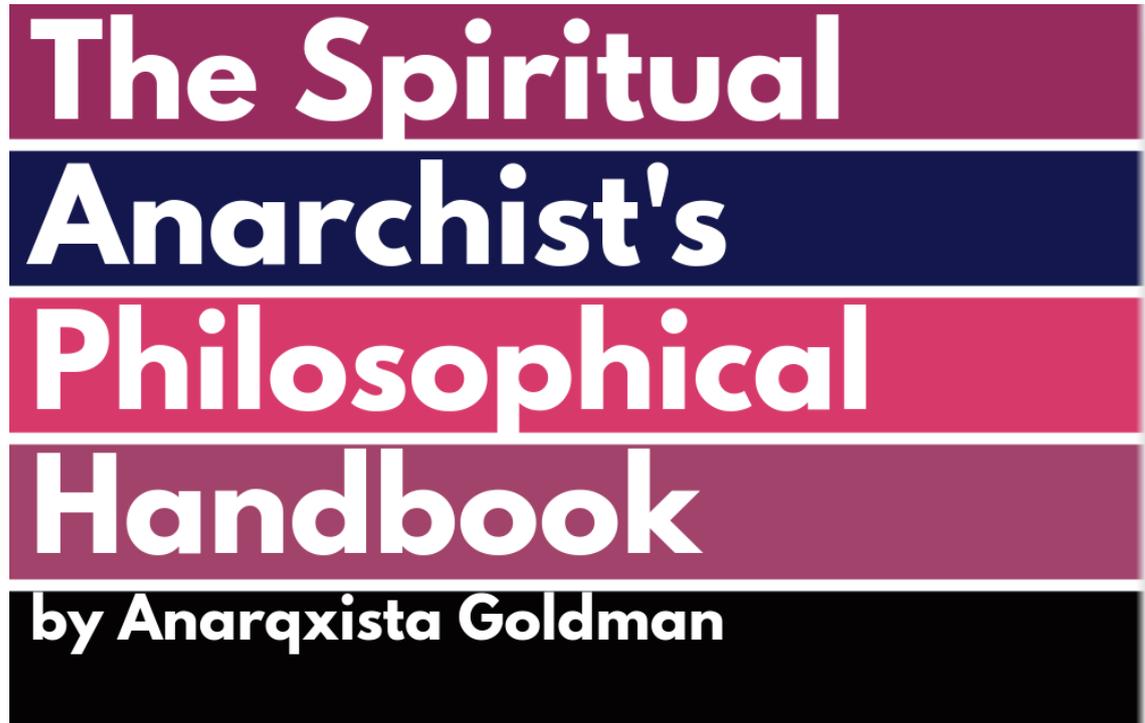


The Spiritual Anarchist's Philosophical Handbook

Anarqxista Goldman



**The Spiritual
Anarchist's
Philosophical
Handbook
by Anarqxista Goldman**

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Contents

Prologue	4
Introduction	7
Anarchist Liturgy I: Serenely Carefree	11
Gender and Sexuality	13
Revolutionary and Evolutionary Anarchism: Is Anarchy Possible?	17
Dream Conversation About Interpretation	29
Anarchist Liturgy II: The Dhammapada	40
Meat, Veganism And The Way of All Things	52
Anarchist Liturgy III: For Daily Recital	58
The Wanderer's Shadow	61
The Mirror and the Seashore	62
An Anarchist Handbook Cannot Be Written	65
Tao Te Ching and Nothing to Stick To	71
The Book of Zhuangzi and Nothing to Stick to	81
Heraclitus	102
Liezi and Nothing to Stick to	116
The First Daoist Anarchist Text: Neither Lord Nor Subject	129
The Anarchist Manifesto of a First Century Cynic Jew	132
Anarchism is Not Socialism and its Not Civilisation	140
Anarchist Liturgy IV: Mind Inscriptions	145
Simplicity, The Most Subversive Thing in the World	156

Tilopa's Anarchy

162

Epilogue

165

Prologue

The future is the past,
The past is the future.
All are one.

From multiple points in time and space voices are heard.
These voices utter words which are unintelligible.
They say nothing.
They communicate nothing.
They know nothing.

They are the voices of the Source.

Go beyond the streams
And leave desires behind.
Give up contemplation and meditation,
Press on to the other shore.
Break the boundaries of conscious thought,
Until there is no shore and be free.

Empty and at peace,
Free from passion.
Beyond light and dark,
In the brightness of awokenness.
Beyond right and wrong, beyond teachings,
At peace.

No longer petty,
No longer returning like for like.
No longer seeking pleasure,
No longer hurting or causing pain.
No longer damaging with thought, word or deed,
A being under control.

To revere the Source
Is good.
To see it through appearance
And familiarity.
To meet the truth
And separateness.

Things are not as they seem,
The world is not as it appears.
The wealthy are not rich,

The esteemed are not noble.
You are free when,
You have broken all human bonds.
To have cut the ties and loosened the fastenings,
To have opened the door is to awake.
To have gained innocence and endured,
Is to touch infinity.
To exist beyond one body, self-trained,
Is to recognise immortality.
Not to cling but to flow,
Is to become the Source.
To put down the burden,
Is to experience new life.
To have wisdom beyond the path,
Is to gaze upon the highest end.
To be a wanderer and alone,
Without desire.
To not kill nor wish to kill,
To care for all life.
Tolerant, peaceful, free from greed,
In regard to all things.
Lust, hate, pride, insincerity,
Are unknown in the Source.
Here peace, usefulness and truth,
Are one.
To be given and not to take,
Is its wisdom.
To not crave heaven or earth
Or the Source is infinite freedom.
With a mind beyond doubt,
And a longing for nothing.
Beyond good and evil,
Beyond sorrow and passion.
To find pleasure in that which does not pass away
Is the Source.
To have passed beyond the illusion
Of conditioned things.
To wander without a home,
But not to care.
To experience neither gods nor men
Nor yet even all creation as a bondage.
To have escaped the fetters
Of pleasure and pain.

To have learned the secret
Of going and returning.
To walk a path no one knows,
Past, present, future as nothing.
An inner life pure and conquering,
That has reached journey's end.
Free from life that ends in death,
Who bathes in the river that is the Source.
The future is the past,
The past is the future.
All are one.

Introduction

Had you read the previous book in the series of books I have been doing [and you should], that book being the third in a series on anarchy philosophically and spiritually understood which, taken together, were titled *There is Nothing to Stick to*, you would have learnt that anarchism, imagined as a 19th century political movement to readjust society away from owners and capital and coercive states, is not something I fall in line with. There is, it seems to me, always going to be a problem when anarchism is imagined merely politically and this problem can be summed up by imagining politics as merely the business of shuffling the passengers on the Titanic. The ship is still going to sink because its still going to hit the iceberg. Anarchy merely politically imagined, I think, is just such a vessel doomed to failure because such political anarchy, for all its good intentions and righteous indignation at coercive forms of civilisation, only itself wants to reorganise the pieces of the same puzzle. Political anarchism imagines that if we organise people differently – in whichever anarchist or broadly socialist form is chosen – then all will be well. I think this is naive and stupid. I think the problem is not simply how people are organised but the people themselves! That being the case, if all you do is reorganise the people, even along anarchist lines, all you get is the same kinds of people that have been reorganised. The spiritual, philosophical anarchy I have spoken about in the three books of *There is Nothing to Stick to* before this one, to the contrary, recognise that you not only need a lack of organisation, you also need people who are willing to change themselves or be changed. Anarchy, if it is to run smoothly, requires certain kinds of people.

This may, at first, seem counter-intuitive and, if you are still stuck viewing anarchism as a political movement, you probably have reason to see it that way. But the context for anarchism, as I tried to explain primarily in the third of the three previous books in the *There is Nothing to Stick to* series, is not earthbound politics but a spiritual and philosophical conception of everything that is. This is anarchism. Anarchy is not something we make; anarchism is what we were always already in and what was always already acting upon us. On this understanding anarchism doesn't need to be made: it already exists! Some have broadly equated this anarchism with nature or the natural world, the random ways in which the physical universe has organised itself, without coercion and without "action" [understood in a Daoist sense]. I fully endorse this way of thinking, a way that in previous books of mine I saw supported by Daoists before the Common Era and by Cynics in the Hellenistic world at roughly the same time. These were two early "anti-civilisation" movements which saw the dangers in moving away from living in a simple harmony with nature. Whilst it is true to say that now, over 2,000 years of human activity later, this horse has long since bolted in many parts of our planet, this, by itself, forces no one to accept that "we must all be civilised now". Both Daoist and Cynic examples suggest a path of principled self-actualisation regardless of the prevailing external conditions. Both imagine that things change when people themselves change, have a moment of realisation and then determine to live a life according to a specific practice, one in tune with their natural surroundings and that takes them into account. This is

not an external coerciveness but an inner formation based on what I can only conceive of as a “spiritual” appreciation of existence as it is within a philosophical context.

So here I am saying that for the human being to realise their place in everything that exists, something human beings have seemed to want to do for as long as they have existed, they have to see themselves in the context of the whole, they have to realise that all this was not made for them but that they were made as a tiny, insignificant [and quite random and unnecessary] part of it but, nevertheless, a part that is part of a great chain of interconnected existence. We can affect the whole and it, or the other parts of it, can affect us too. Indeed, all these parts are constantly interacting with each other to make the whole what it is. Once you do that, of course, you begin to give yourself a context and, indeed, to ask after what this context is like and is about. You gain an awareness which can be corrupted into a self-conscious, fictional narrative in which you tell existence what it is rather than living in its free flow. This is precisely the Daoist [and sometimes the Zen] point and how it goes about articulating its own anarchy. That point is that all words, descriptions, narratives are fictions and that “the way of all things” cannot be captured within them. Existence goes on its way, just as it is, beyond words and so, consequently, beyond human knowledge or understanding, something which is beholden to words and language. It is, in this sense, ineffable – anarchically so. The Daoist and Cynic perspective is that to be most in accord with this ineffable, inexpressible “way” is to operate at our optimum and to actualise ourselves as natural human beings to our maximum potential.

Clearly, this involves taking account of these other things and realising that they exist just as randomly or unnecessarily or accidentally as we do. This should inculcate a togetherness, an acknowledgement of kinship and familiarity. This togetherness, of course, is a togetherness of difference for we are not all made as clones of each other and the whole of creation contains many species of things each formed in their circumstances and in their own way. Yet all come from the same source. All share many circumstances in common including, not least, the interconnected necessity of everything else for everything exists thanks to lots of other things it had no hand in creating – just like we do. To recognise this togetherness, this contingency of existence and this need to appreciate the whole takes an awareness and much that you might read in and about both Daoism and Zen Buddhism focuses on awareness, an awareness of reality when human fictions that often seek to bind it are exploded and dissolved. Similarly, from both oriental and Greek sources, we get the notion that “everything flows”, a notion which inculcates “living in the moment” in a natural environment that is always changing, even as we ourselves are. Indeed, in those Eastern spiritualities I have so far mentioned the notion of a fixed “self” is anathema. For them change is normal and stasis is what is unnatural and this is partly why notions of fixed narratives which “describe” or “understand” reality are regarded as fictional and delusional.

Primarily what we learn from the background, philosophical and spiritual, that I have explored in the wider *There is Nothing to Stick to* project, which you can read through for yourself, is that it is not us that should be changing things to suit us [and often only us or even only some privileged few of us – call that characteristic of civilisation] but that it is us which should be changed ourselves. In particular, we should never allow ourselves to become set in our ways or normalised to a narrative – either of self or about the world. The understanding of anarchy I seek to speak to is one of flow, of change, of movement, of something beyond control and beyond intention, of an environment which is in some sense a harmony – but never a harmony that wants to go anywhere or that has a purpose. People give things purposes but the way of all things has no purpose, goal or end point in sight. It has no sight. Part of reconciling oneself to

the anarchy that I claim is always already here, brought to such a point by my readings in Daoist texts, Zen texts, texts about the Cynics, the texts of certain Western philosophers, is adjusting oneself to this change and flow and unlearning much that one has previously been taught and that now forms the framework of our thinking such that thoughts of change and flow, of radical anarchy apparent and existent everywhere in the universe, become disturbing thoughts.

Yet it is my suggestion that this is exactly what we must do for it is how we think – and consequently who we are – that is the problem and not merely external things like political organisation or the structure of society. These, in fact, are manifestations of who we have become. But they do not need to be and they are changeable. Indeed, the whole point of my writing on this topic, in one sense, has been to say that we don't have to be who we currently appear to be. In many respects to become more natural, more contingent, more harmonious beings – which I am saying is the beings that we actually can be – we need to do what Zen and Daoism each, in their way, suggest and to forget everything and “know nothing”. I will go into this further below but, for now, it is safe only to say that a major stumbling block to living more natural [which is necessarily less, or post-] civilised lives is giving up much customary human thinking and abandoning many of the social fictions that we have saddled ourselves with, things, for example, such as money and monetary value, the concept of countries or territories and the idea of government. It is very much my view that people make societies and a logical consequence of this is that any society, however formulated or structured, can only be the sum of its parts, the result of its organisation.

That said and acknowledged, there cannot be a peaceful, harmonious, “equal” or “environmentally friendly” human society anywhere whilst the people are themselves individually unpeaceful, disharmonious, unequal and environmentally unfriendly – as well as living inauthentic lives of bad faith towards themselves and others to boot. I am talking here [quite openly] about a spiritual and philosophical reformation at the personal level and I see this as the necessary precursor to a better world. I do not say it is necessary for anarchy though. *Anarchy is whatever is the case right now*. It is not the case, however, that every thought and action we take mirrors the anarchy that is existence in its nature and manner of operation. It is this which the philosophical and spiritual resources I have explored in *There is Nothing to Stick to* seek to explore and exploit. They are an argument, when put together as I have sought to do in three previous books, for acting more exactly in accordance with existence most broadly understood in its manner of operation. They seek to promote peaceful, harmonious and fundamentally authentic living within that context. They are in part a reflection of this anarchy and in part a playing our part in it. They are to make this anarchy personal and to take it personally. They are an argument for anarchy at the existential level and an argument for human society as the sum of its parts much as I see something like the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Zhuangzi* saying too. They are to argue that we will not bring the presumed benefits of anarchist political action to our habitat by political action but only by being changed personally ourselves so that the political state anarchism imagines comes to be by a natural osmosis. Osmosis or terrible disaster are the only two routes to a state of anarchism politically understood. The first is preferable on numerous easily imaginable grounds.

And so it is to personal change, seeing things differently and nature in its manner of operation that I will turn in what follows. I will focus on the philosophical and spiritual traditions that I think best display this but you are free to think of others for it is not here about laying down rules, creating a canon or fabricating a new narrative. In fact, it may very well be about forgetting such things whole and entire and just co-existing [for existence is always a co-existence]. What

we probably need, however, is another point of view and to recognise that these validly exist, a thought which, in itself, is now often thought dubious in some quarters in these highly partisan times. It doesn't really matter how it came to this. It does, however, matter that it doesn't have to be like this. No one will ultimately be forcing you to be like anything though and the anarchistic state of nature, existence itself, the universe, does not care at all. You may live a life of destructive and rapacious self-interest or you may quietly bide your time in peaceful, co-existent isolation. In the grand scheme of things, it makes no difference. The story of existence is much, much greater than the story of you and I or even of every possible "you" and every possible "I". But that is not the point here. The point here is "How are you going to exist, in a conscious and peaceful co-existence or as a one person wrecking crew?"

Peace be with you.

Anarchist Liturgy I: Serenely Carefree

Serenely carefree, nothing to change;
Contented and Oblivious, what need for words?
Empty mind doesn't scatter,
So no need to stop worldly cares.
The past is already past,
The future can't be reckoned.
Sitting serenely carefree,
Why would anyone come to visit?
Seeking to work on things —
Its all foolishness!

As for provisions, not one grain:
If a meal is offered, just scoff it down.
Worldly folk full of needless care,
Always chasing yet never get it.

To neither desire heavenly realms,
Nor want blessings in this world.
When hungry, eat;
When tired, sleep.
Fools may laugh at me,
But the wise know this wisdom.
Its not stupidity —
It is the source of our being.

When you must go, go;
When you must stay, stay.
Only a ragged robe
And bare feet.

Too much talking, too many words,
Can only lead to mistakes and illusions.
In order to save others,
Liberate yourself!

You cannot find what is without form.
Nature and spirit
Need testing and refining?
Mind that is no thing;
Your face, the face before your birth.
The rock that is finally worn away,

Yet remains unchanged.

Carefree is nothing but that —
No need anymore for words!
When the illusion of yourself is gone,
Everything falls into place as it is.

Is wearing yourself out over this and that,
More useful than just lying down and taking a nap?
Raising your head, the sun's already high;
Look for food and gulp it down.

Intending on results,
You simply fall prey to ignorance.
Trying to grasp what cannot be gotten:
You let go and there it is!

There is one "word";
With that, all concepts and relations are gone.
It evades clever explanation,
For only mind conveys it.

Again just one "word",
Direct and without medium.
Smaller than small,
From no direction or place.
Whole and complete,
Unconstructed and without effort.

Consumed by cares and concerns
Is far from natural stillness
Where trees obscure the sun
And clear streams flow on their way,
Lying down on the forest floor,
Head pillowed on a smooth stone,
With mountain clouds as a curtain
And night moon to light the way.
Not rising for the noble,
Why envy those the world honours?
Not even birth-death concerns me —
What is left to grieve about?

Like the moon reflected in water that has no fixed form;
That's the way to be.
Each and every thing as it is;
Original and unborn.
Sitting, selfless, serene and carefree:
Spring comes and the grass grows green of itself.

Gender and Sexuality

In among the notes gathered in Friedrich Nietzsche's literary remains, in modern terms called *The Will to Power* and marketed as a book, the 274th note, dated to somewhere between spring and autumn of 1887, is one that begins, "Whose will to power is morality?" This is a generally interesting question and one that motivates much of Nietzsche's own thinking. It is also one that sets me off on my own journey of thought and this is particularly so when Nietzsche continues by saying, "The common factor in the history of Europe since Socrates is the attempt to make moral values dominate over all other values" [emphasis mine]. Nietzsche himself suggests that such moral values have been used in an attempt to dominate both "knowledge" and "political and social endeavours" and is a means used by the weak, the suffering, the underprivileged, the mediocre, to actualise their instincts against and, indeed, over and above their stronger, more privileged, more exceptional, brethren. One major problem Nietzsche finds with this, of course, is that it is an artificial narrative opposed to life, life itself not knowing or caring about relative strength, privilege, fitness, prosperity or suffering. Life, which simply goes on its way, is not concerned with the morality of knowledge or the morality of political and social endeavours. Life, which is simply a matter of that which can exist, survive and prosper, that which can, in Nietzschean terms, demonstrate its strength through its will to power, has no morality. Morality is, thus, exposed as an entirely artificial, human-manufactured narrative or competing set of narratives.

Having read this in Nietzsche's note, I began to think of the modern world of my experience to see if I could think of areas which would fit such a description to see if I could recognise Nietzsche's late 19th century thinking in my early 21st century context. Would it be possible to find people using moral values to dominate knowledge and/or political and social endeavours in a contemporary setting? I didn't have to think very far for in the subject of gender and sexuality we have a perfect example. Here, it seems to me, and whatever side of an intellectual divide one may be on, we find a subject in which what is regarded as knowledge within it, and how one practices one's existence socially and politically, it is certain moral values which are constitutive of these things. Here, for example, transsexuality is a contested concept which, depending on your moral values, may be entirely imagined, a fact of biology or psychology, an enculturated narrative, a personal choice, or a political narrative utilised for political purposes. Here there is not even any agreement on what transsexuality might be or where it comes from. Indeed, given that, in line with Nietzsche's thinking, it would seem that here moral values want to be the arbiter of what constitutes knowledge of this subject, it raises the question of if knowledge is ever independent of such moral values at all. Could knowledge be moral and so, again following Nietzschean thinking, a matter of perspectival interpretation? Here one will recall the further Nietzschean verity that "there are no moral phenomena but only a moral interpretation of phenomena." "Moral evaluation," thinks Nietzsche, "is an exegesis, a way of interpreting" [emphasis original]. It is "the only scheme of interpretation by which man can endure himself — a kind of pride?". What Nietzsche diagnoses here is that human beings have found that they need to

intellectually ground and substantiate themselves as the things they interpret themselves to be and, in doing so, this legitimises some things and delegitimises others. Moral values are invented as things which exist [in themselves] and often as things thought fixed and determinative. And so are invented right and wrong, better and worse, good and evil, reality and appearance, fact and value.

But thinking something is so, it should be noted and repeated as necessary, does not make it so. What's more, it can never make it so for thinking does not have the power to make things so but only ever to see things under a certain interpretation, an interpretation, furthermore, which then becomes a boundary or a limitation. "I believe in God" does not mean God exists; it means merely that you interpret the world as something in which God exists, as something in which how you interpret your experience allows the interpretation which you then take up. Yet one problem with human perception, perhaps amongst many, is that it can easily be demonstrated that such perception can be fooled or that it sees contextually and under a certain guiding scheme of interpretation. All you need do is find someone who regards the same thing otherwise and there you go. Interpretations are not necessities. One person believes in this God, that one in another, a third in no gods at all. The world, then, allows us to interpret, which is often the same as to see, in many different ways, or even in any way that we can, and it doesn't care which way we interpret or why although we, the interpreters, may care intimately. The universe, we may say, is completely agnostic and I find this to be a very interesting, if not to say a significant and suggestive, thing about it. Put very simply, we may describe this interest in the question, "If the universe doesn't care about our interpretations, and so our moral values, then why should we?"

It is exactly in questions of gender and sexuality that I personally find this question the most pointed. People all over the world regard themselves as varying genders and sexualities and for many differing reasons. Some, but not all, of these people imagine that things such as gender or sexuality are "hard-wired" matters of biology and so, they further imagine, this means they have no choice in deciding what they are for it is something they never had a say in deciding. But it seems to me that even this very kind of thinking is a matter of an interpretation and the rules that are in play for such a kind of interpreting. In one interpretation of the interpretive field labelled "biology" things just are what they are and speak for themselves. They, somehow, speak without speaking and tell you that you have a gender and a sexuality which is knitted in with the DNA which constitutes your body. This then tells you who you are and, in certain respects, how you should act. But isn't biology itself only a human field of study, a matter of human observations and so, necessarily, interpretations, about life and its biological building blocks? Isn't biology, then, not an escape from interpretation to some self-arbitrating world of "facts" but precisely and exactly interpretation itself, the giving of a humanly-constituted narrative about observed "biological" phenomena?

In short, any biological narrative about sex and gender is no more and no less interpretation than the most self-indulgent of self-reportings of exactly the same things. Interpretation is not something anyone ever escapes and you can't recourse to "facts" or "science" to do so because it is only interpretations which create and make sense of facts, and science is itself interpretation. These things, amongst others, which wield any weight in conversation of such matters only do so in relation to the moral values which are operative as arbiters amongst those who discuss such things. If someone wishes to delegitimise transsexuality, for example, they may do so by attempting to appeal to what they regard as certain biological facts or scientific narratives about biology. What are such people saying at bottom? They are saying the outcomes of such narra-

tives are useful to them, they are saying they validate their own values, they are saying such rhetoric serves their purposes. Are they demonstrating an understanding of biology or merely repeating someone else's veridical understanding of biology? I don't believe so and I don't believe so because I ask myself what would demonstrate an understanding of biology and I don't think simple [or even repeated] human observation would be enough to establish that. But that is not important anyway. The point is that it seems to me that here, on all sides, moral values are attempting to fix the price of things according to moral criteria rather than purely, which means merely, epistemological ones [assuming that epistemology itself is not, in fact, a subset of moral evaluation]. To have an evaluation called truth to which one thinks one has a duty to coincide is to be a morally evaluating being, a being which wants its truths to be something called moral.

However, do we, unlike the universe, unlike life, unlike existence, have any need to pay heed to such moral values and their morally conjured interpretations? Not everybody thinks so. And not everybody agrees on how or even if we should. In relation to the specific topic that I have chosen to speak about here, I ask myself why and how it should matter if someone calls themselves male or female or neither or nothing or something else such as "gender fluid" at all? Does it matter? Why does it matter? The concept human being, *homo sapiens*, is an interpretation. If we met a so-called Neanderthal man today, a genetic ancestor of our artificially designated species, would we regard them as a relation or as, in a rhetorical use of language, an "animal"? [We are all animals, no less we ourselves.] This points out to me, at least, that interpretation often instigates bold, hard and fast distinctions between things where they don't, in fact, in reality [which is precisely NOT how we see things], actually exist. A male and female are in a vast majority of things plausibly the same. So why have some people felt the need to speak and act as if they are two completely different species, things to be divided, split apart, regarded as if they had entirely different lives? Are their lives any more different than the lives of two individuals of any kind? Why have the lesser differences been emphasised and hard-wired into our thinking as opposed to the greater similarities? Why is anyone who, for whatever reason [and I regard these reasons as largely insignificant], doesn't see themselves as fitting into this binary distinction seen [by some] as some kind of more or less exotic freak even though they too are largely exactly the same as their binary-gendered co-humans and exist due to the same biological processes? Here interpretation is a cutting weapon out to do damage and separate one thing from another for entirely generated moral reasons. The distinctions here are often transparently moral as in when gendered political organisations define gender or sexuality or both along ideological lines in order to further their front-loaded political objectives. That such people often recourse to "biology" — as if this were not just another human-manufactured interpretive narrative — shows their desire to escape interpretation, and so human responsibility for their own values, even as they deploy just another version of it to further their generated purposes.

It is my intuition and, I must also say, my instinct, that what gender or sexuality someone describes themselves as should make much less difference to our everyday lives than it actually does. Such things should be non-controversial and of merely passing or peripheral interest. I say this not from any human-generated sense of privilege or lack of the same, but simply because the universe itself doesn't pay it any attention. Any single way we can imagine to think of ourselves, any description we wish to put ourselves under or see ourselves as, is at least false [because partial and far from complete] and a fiction of our own making, a self-interested narrative for reasons that are ours alone. It may serve purposes for us but it is, generally speaking, of little or no importance. You are what you are and you can do what you can do. This is not to deny that there

are differences between people — who could deny that? — but it is to say that they should matter or make a difference far less than they do. You and I are human beings but no one except human beings really cares about that. The context here is not “human thinking which is very important and even definitive for the universe” but “the universe which doesn’t even realise human beings exist”. The problem is that in many places human narratives have become all-important and now what human beings say and think — and the moral values that are constitutive of that — take precedence over a reality that doesn’t care about such things. The world is made to fit our thinking rather than letting things be what they will be in a world that doesn’t, left to its own devices, care at all. Such artificial and self-important, egotistical evaluating is the cause of many of humanity’s problems and the motive force of many needless enmities. Human beings are at war with themselves in some imagined need to dominate an imagined conceptual world which they then want to make real. Having made an imagined real, they then rhetorically deploy it in order to subdue others and bring them under their intellectual authority in a game of will to power, will to dominate, will to subdue. In this, as Nietzsche suggested, it might be nothing more than the feeling of power they get from this, their own selfish self-actualisation, which, quite without moral or intellectual input, is driving them on. It was, you will not be surprised to learn, Nietzsche, who argued that morality is itself not moral, springing, as it does, from a purely immoral source.

So I take it that it does not matter [in the vast majority of things] if you are male or female, gender fluid, non-binary, gay, straight, queer, pansexual, or whatever description you want to apply to yourself. Neither does it matter if you come to your conclusions from some imagined biological narrative or a self-interpreted one. Frankly speaking, who cares? It is pretty much entirely your business alone and everyone should be left to themselves to consider such things for themselves. In addition, other people should not regard it as their business to pass judgment on such matters or to criticise or undermine other people’s feelings about themselves which should be non-controversial in a world in which the much more important fact is that we are all human beings. Such things should become topics that completely lose their interest as topics of discussion. This, of course, is only my interpretation and yours may be different — but I insist that mine is a better one even though I know very well that there will never be any way to show that until or unless you come to agree with me. All I can do is point out that all human thinking is interpretation and all human narratives fictional whilst pointing out that nothing real or eternal cares what the humans think on the irrelevant planet which they live on and far too many of them think of as “theirs”. What then matters, I suggest, is a “live and let live” mentality where said human beings don’t spend their minute amounts of time as conscious identities squabbling over who said what, how people dress, who they want to fuck and who is in charge. These things are minutiae in a cosmic context of life itself, of existence as it is. People should not be so egotistical and self-regarding. What you think is not important and neither does it need to be. The world is not what you think it is and it never will be. Who you are is only a piece of imagination, a fiction, a possibly useful tale you tell yourself. It is not actually who you are for words are not things and words are not the reality they imagine to describe. Who would you be if there was no language? None of the things you think you are now!

Revolutionary and Evolutionary Anarchism: Is Anarchy Possible?

Let us imagine that we wanted to take anarchism, and the benevolent anarchy most anarchists [politically construed] claim to seek, to task. What we are then looking for here is the problems with political anarchism. These might include asking what such anarchism wants and if it has a realistic plan to get there whilst, at the same time, asking what the consequences in general, and not only for the willing anarchists, are in that destination and that imagined route. It might also ask if such an imagined political anarchism is even possible in the terms described.

So, before I dig into that and develop it further, let's start this essay by quoting a few people in regard to these things. Let us ask ourselves what people have said about anarchism and its aim, a state of anarchy:

“Anarchism is founded on the observation that since few men are wise enough to rule themselves, even fewer are wise enough to rule others.” — Edward Abbey

“Anarchism...rests upon the doctrine that no man has a right to control by force the action of any other man.” — Lyman Abbott

“As the word ‘anarchy’ etymologically signifies the negation of governmental authority, the absence of government, it follows that one indissoluble bond unites the anarchists. This is antagonism to all situations regulated by imposition, constraint, violence, governmental oppression, whether these are a product of all, a group, or of one person. In short, whoever denies that the intervention of government is for human relationships is an anarchist. But this definition would have only a negative value did it not possess, as a practical complement, a conscious attempt to live outside this domination and servility which are incompatible with the anarchist conception. An anarchist, therefore, is an individual who, whether he has been brought to it by a process of reasoning or by sentiment, lives to the greatest possible extent in a state of legitimate defence against authoritarian encroachments. From this it follows that anarchist individualism — the tendency which we believe contains the most profound realization of the anarchist idea — is not merely a philosophical doctrine — it is an attitude, an individual way of life.” — Émile Armand

“Anarchism is ‘stateless socialism.’” — Mikhail Bakunin

“Anarchism means a condition or society where all men and women are free, and where all enjoy equally the benefits of an ordered and sensible life... Anarchism means voluntary cooperation instead of forced participation. It means harmony and order in place of interference and disorder.” — Alexander Berkman

“Almost anyone, I suppose, can call himself or herself an anarchist, if he or she believed that the society could be managed without the state. And by the state—I don't mean the absence of any institutions, the absence of any form of social organisation—the state really refers to a professional apparatus of people who are set aside to manage society, to preempt the control of society from the people. So that would include

the military, judges, politicians, representatives who are paid for the express purpose of legislating, and then an executive body that is also set aside from society. So anarchists generally believe that, whether as groups or individuals, people should directly run society.” – Murray Bookchin

“Anarchists oppose the idea that power and domination are necessary for society, and instead advocate more co-operative, anti-hierarchical forms of social, political and economic organization.” – L. Susan Brown “Anarchism can be conceived as a kind of voluntary socialism, that is, as libertarian socialist or anarcho-syndicalist or communist anarchist, in the tradition of, say, Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin and others. They had in mind a highly organized form of society, but a society that was organized on the basis of organic units, organic communities. And generally, they meant by that the workplace and the neighborhood, and from those two basic units there could derive through federal arrangements a highly integrated kind of social organization which might be national or even international in scope. And these decisions could be made over a substantial range, but by delegates who are always part of the organic community from which they come, to which they return, and in which, in fact, they live.” – Noam Chomsky

“Anarchism, to me, means not only the denial of authority, not only a new economy, but a revision of the principles of morality. It means the development of the individual, as well as the assertion of the individual. It means self-responsibility, and not leader-worship.” – Voltairine de Cleyre

“Anarchists work towards a society of mutual aid and voluntary cooperation. We reject all government and economic repression.” – Mission statement of anarchist newspaper, Freedom , founded in 1886.

“Politically we are anarchists, and economically, communists or socialists. With regard to political organization the communistic anarchists demand the abolition of political authority, the state; we deny the right of a single class or single individual to govern or rule another class or individual. We hold that, as long as one man is under the dictation of another, as long as one man can in any form subjugate his fellow man, and as long as the means of existence can be monopolized by a certain class or certain individuals, there can be no liberty. Concerning the economical form of society, we advocate the communistic or co-operative method of production.” – Adolph Fischer

“The ideally non-violent state will be an ordered anarchy. That State is the best governed which is governed the least.” – Mohandas K. Gandhi

“Anarchy stands for the liberation of the human mind from the dominion of religion; the liberation of the human body from the dominion of property; liberation from the shackles and restraints of government.” – Emma Goldman

“Anarchism is really a synonym for socialism. The anarchist is primarily a socialist whose aim is to abolish the exploitation of man by man. Anarchism is only one of

the streams of socialist thought, that stream whose main components are concern for liberty and haste to abolish the State.” — Daniel Guerin

“An anarchist is someone who doesn’t need a cop to make him behave. Anarchism is voluntary cooperation with the right of secession. The individual or the family or the small group as a unit instead of the State.” — Ammon Hennacy

“A Monarchist is one who believes a monarch should govern. A Plutocrat believes in the rule of the rich. A Democrat holds that the majority should dictate. An Aristocrat thinks only the wise should decide; while an Anarchist does not believe in government at all... An Anarchist is one who minds his own business. An Anarchist does not believe in sending warships across wide oceans to kill brown men, and lay waste rice fields, and burn the homes of people who are fighting for liberty. An Anarchist does not drive women with babes at their breasts and other women with babes unborn, children and old men into the jungle to be devoured by beasts or fever or fear, or die of hunger, homeless, unhouseled and undone. Destruction, violence, ravages, murder, are perpetrated by statute law.” — Elbert Hubbard

“ANARCHISM (from the Gr. , and , contrary to authority), the name given to a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government — harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being.” — Peter Kropotkin

“Anarchism’s lone objective is to end the fight of men against men and to unite humanity so that each individual can unfold his natural potential without obstruction.” — Gustav Landauer

“We anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves.” — Errico Malatesta

“Anarchy – anarchon – no leaders. Which means, everybody is a leader. You can’t have an official set of rules for anarchy. I tend to think such connections casually, and break and form and break and form throughout our lives. If you look back ten years, you will remember a group of friends who you were productively involved with at that time, now some of them have drifted away, new people have come in. These are more naturalistic linkages, which exist while there is a need for them to exist. It’s more like the way ants work.” — Alan Moore

“Anarchism is, fundamentally, an ethical critique of authority — almost an ethical duty to question and resist domination in all its forms.” — Saul Newman

“Anarchists know that a long period of education must precede any great fundamental change in society, hence they do not believe in vote begging, nor political campaigns, but rather in the development of self-thinking individuals. We look away

from government for relief, because we know that force (legalized) invades the personal liberty of man, seizes upon the natural elements and intervenes between man and natural laws; from this exercise of force through governments flows nearly all the misery, poverty, crime and confusion existing in society... Most anarchists believe the coming change can only come through a revolution, because the possessing class will not allow a peaceful change to take place; still we are willing to work for peace at any price, except at the price of liberty.” — Lucy Parsons

“ANARCHY, or the government of each man by himself — or as the English say, self-government.” — Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

“Violence, contrary to popular belief, is not part of the anarchist philosophy. It has repeatedly been pointed out by anarchist thinkers that the revolution can neither be won, nor the anarchist society established and maintained, by armed violence. Recourse to violence then is an indication of weakness, not of strength, and the revolution with the greatest possibilities of a successful outcome will undoubtedly be the one in which there is no violence, or in which violence is reduced to a minimum, for such a revolution would indicate the near unanimity of the population in the objectives of the revolution.” — Vernon Richards

“I am an anarchist not because I believe anarchism is the final goal, but because there is no such thing as a final goal.” — Rudolf Rocker

“Anarchism is opposed to states, armies, slavery, the wages system, the landlord system, prisons, monopoly capitalism, oligopoly capitalism, state capitalism, bureaucracy, meritocracy, theocracy, oligarchy, governments, patriarchy, matriarchy, monarchy, oligarchy, protection rackets, intimidation by gangsters, and every other kind of coercive institution. In other words, anarchism opposes government in all its forms... Anarchists are extreme libertarian socialists, “libertarian” meaning the demand for freedom from prohibition, and “socialist” meaning the demand for social equality. ...Complete freedom implies equality, since if there are rich and poor, the poor cannot be permitted to take liberties with riches. Complete equality implies freedom, since those who suffer restrictions cannot be the equals of those who impose them.” — Donald Room

“I define anarchist society as one where there is no legal possibility for coercive aggression against the person or property of any individual.” — Murray Rothbard

“My political opinions lean more and more to Anarchy (philosophically understood, meaning abolition of control not whiskered men with bombs) ... The most improper job of any man ... is bossing other men. Not one in a million is fit for it, and least of all those who seek the opportunity.” — J.R.R. Tolkien

“The Anarchists are right in everything; in the negation of the existing order, and in the assertion that, without authority, there could not be worse violence than that of authority under existing conditions. They are mistaken only in thinking that Anarchy can be instituted by a revolution. ‘To establish Anarchy.’ ‘Anarchy will be

instituted.' But it will be instituted only by there being more and more people who do not require protection from governmental power, and by there being more and more people who will be ashamed of applying this power." — Leo Tolstoy

"Anarchism is for liberty, and neither for nor against anything else. Anarchy is the mother of cooperation, — yes, just as liberty is the mother of order; but, as a matter of definition, liberty is not order nor is Anarchism co-operation. I define Anarchism as the belief in the greatest amount of liberty compatible with equality of liberty; or, in other words, as the belief in every liberty except the liberty to invade." — Benjamin Tucker

"The genuine Anarchist looks with sheer horror upon every destruction, every mutilation of a human being, physical or moral. He loathes wars, executions and imprisonments, the grinding down of the worker's whole nature in a dreary round of toil, the sexual and economic slavery of women, the oppression of children, the crippling and poisoning of human nature by the preventable cruelty and injustice of man to man in every shape and form." — Charlotte Wilson "Anarchism is the attempt to eradicate domination. This includes not only such obvious forms as the nation-state, with its routine use of violence and the force of law, and the corporation, with its institutionalized irresponsibility, but also such internalized forms as patriarchy, racism, homophobia. Also it is the attempt to expose the ways our philosophy, religion, economics, and other ideological constructions perform their primary function, which is to rationalize or naturalize — make seem natural — the domination that pervades our way of life: the destruction of the natural world or of indigenous peoples, for example, comes not from the result of decisions actively made and actions pursued, but instead, so we convince ourselves, as a manifestation of Darwinian selection, or God's will, or economic exigency. Beyond that, Anarchism is the attempt to look even into those parts of our everyday lives we accept as givens, as part of the universe, to see how they, too, dominate us or facilitate our domination over others... Most fundamentally, I would see Anarchism as a synonym for anti-authoritarianism." — John Zerzan

The above are several, disparate takes on anarchy and anarchism and you may enjoy, consider, muse upon or dispute them, and any others you find, at your leisure. We can see there little love for the State, for government, for authority [especially the imposed kind although, in truth, authority is always imposed if you haven't consented to it yourself] and yet varying opinions on what we then do in the absence of these things to bring about freedom, liberty, egalitarianism and many other of the imagined totems of the anarchist. But it is precisely here, it seems to me, that the major issue lies: how does one get, or how could one imagine getting, from State, government and authority to freedom, liberty and equality? In my own thinking about this it seems to me the major avenues are violence which destroys the former, or some kind of disaster which abolishes them, or maybe yet a change in society in which they are evolved away from, a reformation from within. If States, governments and the apparatuses of authoritative coercion such as courts, police, prisons, armed forces and all centralising forces generally already exist then your immediate problem, if of an anarchist persuasion, is to remove them. But how? Violence is unlikely to purge

around 200 national governments in the world. A disaster which could do that would likely only have done so by destroying a large part of the world and so the human population. An evolution of society away from authoritarianism could conceivably take centuries or even millennia. So how can this happen realistically and believably?

This issue can be put another way with a question: is it actually even possible to remove the State, government and overarching coercive authority at all? The answer must be yes and no in that we can give numerous historical examples of these things which have, in fact, passed away or been superseded – and yet the concept itself does not and is not for in pretty much all cases something else of similar cast takes its place. In that, it does not matter whether the authority or government is elected or imposed, democratic or tyrannical, capitalist or communist, from an anarchist perspective, because the only issue for such people that matters is that of any imposition on their own liberty or freedom of association. It may be observed, however, that, certainly for at least 2000–3000 years, human beings have, in large numbers, been prepared to consent to various states, governments and authorities in varying forms. This, when amalgamated together, forms the political basis of civilisation more widely construed. Many anarchists, like some of the first anarchists who we now call Cynics and Daoists, were anti-civilisationist in orientation. Today, that is not so clear as some owning the name anarchist see civilisation as something standing in their way [I am probably one such] whereas others think “anarchist civilisation” a possibility. But from the perspective of civilisation, as it has come to be and to flip our perspective again, what might we regard as the pertinent issues if anarchism is proposed in its place? There are a few:

1. It is imagined to be violent.
2. It is argued that without a state there is no one to protect us.
3. To the extent it is utopian it is impossible.
4. It is a contradiction since if all accept it it itself becomes a “state” or authoritative collective ethos. This is perhaps further to say that social control would itself be required to avoid the creation of states.
5. It brings the individual into conflict with the collective.
6. Its idealism leaves it vulnerable to more practical acquisitive philosophies which might usurp power in the vacuum created.
7. No believable road map to the creation of an anarchist social and political world has yet been proposed even if it was desired.

Let us deal with each of these in turn as honestly as we can.

So, first, it is often the case that anarchism is imagined to be violence, the violence which wants to disrupt and destroy the world as it is organised right now in order to remove the contemporary power from its contemporary throne. It must be plainly admitted that in multiple cases that almost anyone can name anarchism in action often does come with a violent face. This need not necessarily mean guns, bombs and death either. Violence, under this rubric, includes actively forcing your way onto mass transit systems in Santiago, Chile or in New York, as I have

seen happening via social media in the last few months as I write this book, in the belief that mass transit systems should be free rather than means to someone's enrichment. Violence here includes using crowds of like-minded people to block some action or activity of others. Violence includes damaging machines by which people are administered into paying for things. All these things routinely take place amongst a number of those who consider themselves anarchist in today's world as their anarchist activism strikes physically against the actions of the actors they consider oppressive to people in general. This violence, which we may consider physical force more generally concerned, may include the gun and the bomb but it more usually does not.

Yet having admitted that anarchism, particularly amongst those who consider themselves political anarchists, perhaps the most popular definition, is routinely or regularly not averse to the use of physical force, we may ask ourselves if such people are the only ones to employ it. This is especially pertinent when such forms of activity are routinely decried and abhorred in mainstream media and the circus of 24/7 rolling news coverage where the same voices for the status quo will, on seeming rotation, line up to denigrate it and the motives behind it. The trouble is it pales into insignificance when set alongside the violence of government or the State and it doesn't really matter to which examples of these things you refer. Is it not violence when a police force determine where you can and can't go and what you can and can't do, even to the level of where you may walk or what you may look at or what you may say? Is it not violence if a person's access to food or clothing or health or shelter is determined according to rules a government has set in place to determine eligibility? Is it not violence to seize wealth and property and to demand the same of others under conditions that the State or government itself determines without needing your consent to do so? Is it not violence to incarcerate people on your own authority? In fact, do not all states and governments only exist by means of physical force, that is, the threat, and sometimes the actuality, of violence? Violence is the person who lives under the bridge in the cardboard box because if she squats in a property the police may be despatched to forcibly evict her and put some notional property rights above her need to shelter herself. Violence is why if you take food from some food company's waste bin, food that has been thrown away, you may be arrested for theft when trying to feed yourself. Consequently, if you are upset and outraged about violence, it is to the State, to government, that you should look first and foremost for it is from there that, daily, thousands upon thousands of acts of violence are routinely sanctioned, ordered and carried out. So, if violence be your problem, at least be consistent about it.

The second point is that, so it is said, without a State there would be no one to protect us. But protect us from who exactly? Do we imagine that, with states, we are all thoroughly and equally well protected now? Such a view would be a travesty of reality. We live in a world where presidents or even business CEOs have public and private armies at their disposal but where ordinary Josephine might not even be able to get a police officer to listen to her legitimate concerns if she is the wrong race or sexual orientation. The state does not, and has never, treated people equally and some are better protected than others. Some are barely protected at all. And, since we are talking about states here, we might ask why any private individual needs nuclear weapons, tanks, depleted uranium bombs, and the whole, vast array of military grade weaponry to protect them anyway as they go about their business. Why do they need the increasingly militarised police forces we see around the world? Who are they protecting us from? If it is the case that violence breeds violence, does not the violence and interference of these militarised forces breed the violence they require to justify their existence? In reality, such forces pick and choose who

they are going to take to task anyway. They are not a state force at anyone's beck and call and so they do not, and if we are honest, could not, protect everyone anyway. So this point proceeds from a falsehood.

The second thing to say on this second point is to address the assumption, perhaps unspoken, that if there were no imagined protection everyone would suddenly be attacking everyone else. This is quite formally an assumption and certainly not an inevitability. It's an assumption, what's more, that doesn't even validate our observance of human beings in general or nature more widely, the latter of which has no police of any kind at all. There are, relatively speaking, a tiny amount of police in the world and myriad crimes do not even come to their attention on a daily basis. And, whilst this is true, it's also true that many incidents and occurrences are dealt with by people amongst themselves as well. Because that's what people do: they sort things out and get on with it. Police have only existed for getting on for 200 years. Was the earth in a state of unremitting turmoil as human being endlessly and ruthlessly attacked and assaulted human being before that time in each and every locality? If so, I have not read such a historical account. So it is a deliberate and unsupported exaggeration to claim that without state protection a society is at endless war with itself. It is, I think, the fear that police may quite often not be necessary that scares the people who make such arguments, people who usually consider that they have a lot to lose and no private army to secure it. This would at least make sense of those who have said that police only exist to secure the property of the rich.

The third point above is that anarchism is to a large extent utopian and utopias are impossible dreams. I think that, depending on how your anarchy looks, this is often correct. It is especially a challenge for those anarchists who think that anarchy is made by human action for they then have to actually show that what they create matches up with what they say they were aiming to create. An anarchist who wants to abolish government has to abolish that government and create something that, by common consent, is better. An anarchist who wants no states has the even harder task of changing the thought and practice of billions of people whilst keeping them happy. In this, it makes little difference what you imagine in place of the thing you want to replace for the force of this charge is that it makes little difference what you imagine to be better if it is impossible to achieve. We can all of us imagine better ways to live and be but that, in itself, says nothing about their likelihood or possibility. If an anarchism is a utopianism it is probably consequently a wish more than a possible reality. This counsels anarchists to realism and achievability in their anarchist hopes and dreams rather than the impossible and unrealisable vision. In fact, it challenges them to properly address what their vision is at all. The fourth point is that if anarchism ever came to be the dominant political and social mode of organisation on earth it would itself become authoritative and so the thing it claims, as an ethos, to be against. But we need to be careful with our terms here. Anarchism, in many forms, is not against social organisation and neither does it deny that organisation could take place [because people would want to organise their wants and needs in tandem with others who shared them]. A number of forms of anarchism, particularly collective forms, actively imagine social organisation playing a healthy role with a properly anarchist motivation behind it. Often, in anarchist vocabulary, this has been spoken of in terms of free association and mutual aid. Are we to imagine that people freely choosing to aid and associate with one another is now oppressive? This does not imply imagining that the needs of such groups would be prioritised above those of others nor that such needs or associations would force others to pay heed to them. However, it does recognise that anarchism is, at bottom, against the idea of imposing any authority upon others to play

along with a practice or condition to which they themselves do not freely consent. Yet, if no coercion is taking place, how sensible would it be to talk of “being coerced not to coerce people” which is what would effectively be the case under the proposal this particular point tries to make? It wouldn’t make much sense at all, although it would be true to say that, in the case of groups of people attempting to become autonomous, the anarchist ethic would need to reassert itself against the actions and impositions of others. But what can we say about that? Where two people disagree, as they probably always will, some pragmatic accommodation or resolution must always be found. That is no different whether one is an inhabitant of civilisation or of an anarchist world. The anarchist, however, might well be less inclined to use force in doing so where the civilised person might recourse to the violence of state apparatus. In any case, I do not see this so much as a problem with or for anarchism as a matter of asking what you do when people disagree or where needs conflict. This is not anarchism specific but anarchism may be a better means to its peaceful resolution.

The fifth issue raised as a problem for anarchism is that it brings the individual into conflict with the collective. What seems to be meant by critics raising this objection is that it is a self contradiction when the anarchist calls for collective action whilst anarchism itself endorses the autonomy of the individual meaning that no collective action can be taken. But I must admit that I do not see this contradiction as an anarchist one. If it exists it is, as before, simply a contradiction in that people, even singly or collectively, may choose different courses, objectives or means. It is not a problem with anarchism. It is anarchism, in fact, which holds that individuals may choose to live and satisfy their needs as accords with their conscience and it does so without coercing them in any direction or via certain means. It does not say they must form a collective and neither does it hinder them from forming a collective. Neither do anarchists in general imagine that life is a competition for resources in which I or we must secure as many as possible to the detriment of others, individuals or groups. It is simply again the case that sometimes people may conflict in their going about their business. They shall have to work it out to their mutual satisfaction just as, in the natural anarchy that is nature, every living being already does. In short, anarchism is not a guarantee of universal peace or lack of conflict and those who argue it is or it should be have misunderstood the thing they claim to discuss.

The sixth point raised above is that anarchism’s idealism leaves it vulnerable to more practical acquisitive philosophies which might usurp power in the vacuum created by the realisation of anarchism. This seems to be the charge that anarchism is rather too idealistic or theoretical, having beliefs about what is best for human beings generally and as social beings who, in some measure, must always live cheek by jowl with one another as it does, and so is ill-placed to compete with those who, in an anarchist world, would utilise their freedom to acquire as much of what they wanted as possible. It would then be imagined that this would give them power and influence as we see many in today’s capitalist societies have over others. So this is really the charge that anarchy is not strong enough to defend itself as an ethos, that what anarchists want is not persuasive enough to persuade some people from being acquisitive beings who simply wish to possess as much as possible and dominate others with it.

It cannot be denied that this is a possibility and it is not the anarchist aim of many anarchists that everyone must come to think as they do, something which is difficult in itself since in a group of 10 anarchists there are probably 10 different ideas about how anarchism should work. All that would unite these anarchists in the end is the belief that no one should force the means or conditions of their existence upon them. But they would be free to agree or disagree with one

another, to bond together in common cause or go it alone, as each desired to and had ability to. Would capitalists just turn up and make everywhere capitalist again? Perhaps. But then you would simply get a renewed cycle of anarchist activity to mitigate it again. In this respect, anarchism is a process, an ongoing process. It is not brainwashing or forcing people to be anarchists but is an ongoing educational process, in theory but more so in practice. Ideally, as Malatesta was quoted as saying above, it is not people being liberated from violence and oppression by others called anarchists but people liberating themselves from the imposed conditions of their own lives. So perhaps others of different mind might attempt to usurp power. Anarchists will always be there inspiring those so usurped to educate themselves and act against what is imposed upon them so that they may act to free themselves again. This is to say that anarchism is not an activity which stops when some notional goal is achieved. Anarchism is a mode of thought but, much more, a way of life. As a way of life, an orientation, a practice, it never stops because, in fact, it only lives in practice. Anarchism is living, and never stopping to live, in an anarchist way.

We come to the seventh and final issue raised above against anarchism by its opponents. This is that no realistic and believable road map to an anarchist world has yet been proposed. Simply stated, I totally agree. But I also think this criticism misconstrues what anarchism is by doing so and argues from a false position. As I have already pointed out in my response to the first criticism, and as some of the quotes I used above made reference to as well, modern civilisation is hardly peace and love to all human beings everywhere. It is, we may say, simply the forced oppression of hundreds of millions of people as they are pressed into a mould of others choosing, a mould, moreover, that treats people in a range of vastly unequal ways. In this mould basic necessities like food, clothing, shelter, health care, things that, by now, we human beings could be providing free of charge to every human being on earth in a grand action of universal dignity and respect, are not provided and are, in fact, actively denied as those with power subject those without it to the consequences of their ideological beliefs [such as property, ownership, the value of money, the requirement to buy and sell] and put these beliefs ahead of human lives. These beliefs, which cause suffering and commit violence against innumerable people on a daily basis, are presented and prosecuted as inviolable when they are in fact nothing more than fictions which serve some better than others. Frankly speaking, they are why many are anarchists at all and they are certainly why said hundreds of millions are oppressed and coerced.

For myself, however, and I can only speak for myself, I would ask if anarchism works in the way that civilisation or capitalism, the current philosophy which causes inequality, suffering, violence and oppression in such deleterious and widespread ways, works. I suggest it doesn't. I don't think of anarchism as an achievement. I don't imagine it has social or political goals. I think of it, first, as a practice. It is a way of living, a way of being, a way of interacting with others. As I see it, it is more evolutionary than revolutionary but even within evolution there are sometimes leaps forward and not simply constant degrees of progress. I don't see it as an anarchist goal to make everyone an anarchist or create, in what to me is a contradiction in terms, an anarchist state. My anarchism would, however, give other people the opportunity to make such a thing if they freely chose to or if it naturally evolved from like-minded anarchists making common cause. My anarchism is the anarchism of Malatesta who wants people to liberate themselves and so it is the anarchism of Lucy Parsons who sees anarchism as a matter of "self-thinking individuals". Anarchism as a social phenomenon is, for me, when people educate themselves into taking responsibility for their own lives, as a matter of self-actualisation, and then proceed to make common ground together. It is in this sense the most radical democracy imaginable and,

not least, because it would be actual democracy rather than the worn out, abused and incomplete versions we currently half-heartedly operate. But it would also be a democracy no one was forced to participate in nor would they be discriminated against for not doing so. So, for me, anarchism has no plan because it does not operate by means of plans. How, in fact, could there be a plan for freedom? Alan Moore completely gets this, above, when he says there are and can be no rules.

So the demand for a plan is actually a mistake and, from the perspective of anarchism's civilised detractors, a trap. It is a trap because it asks anarchism to play by its rules, rules that, if it is to remain anarchism, it cannot play by. Anarchism is a practice, first of all an individual practice, a way of living. Second, it is a participation with others in doing this by nothing more than common consent and interpersonal agreement. It is completely a bottom up phenomenon. No one can speak for you or direct you to do something if one is an anarchist because it is a matter of you actively taking responsibility for yourself. Anarchism, from this point of view, is then a leap in the dark but it is a leap in which, for the first time, you have responsibility for yourself and the truest freedom you have ever yet known. Anarchism is the belief that your freedom is the most valuable thing you could ever have and it is also the belief that it is not something anyone else can give you or take away from you. They may be able to persuade you that it is in their possession or that they or their beliefs control it but when they do that they are lying to you because your freedom and responsibility for yourself is something you always had, something they could only ever rhetorically and violently oppose. There is no plan for an anarchist state, utopian or not, because you are already participating in anarchy and you are already free. You just don't perhaps realise it yet and haven't acted upon it yet.

So this, in the response to this final criticism of anarchism by its opponents, is where my own understanding of anarchy and anarchism comes in. I do not understand anarchy as something human beings create. I understand it as something that human beings already participate in. Anarchy, for me, is the world, the universe, existence itself. All things already are anarchy, as Daoists and Cynics saw, and it is a matter of our self-education to participate in it appropriately. Anarchy is then not an achievement of anarchism; anarchism is the appropriate practice of our existence within anarchy. This, I hope, is what the entirety of this handbook will tell you in its every word and chapter. Anarchism is not some twee political system to be compared with all the other actual and potential political systems; it is the practice of existence in tune with existence as it exists. It is something about who we are, what we are and where we are. It is something fundamental about those things that goes way beyond petty desires to possess or accumulate, to have power or to control. It is a philosophy and even a spirituality in its consequences.

I started off this essay by asking if anarchy was possible and teasing the question of if revolutionary or evolutionary methods were to be preferred but, in conclusion, I must say that not only is it possible: it is unavoidable. Being unavoidable, it only now matters how we reconcile ourselves to it as social beings in a world we are condemned, briefly, to experience as sentient and intelligent life. That is what the whole of the *There is Nothing to Stick to* project, including this book, has been about.

In that, you will probably espy that I prefer evolution to revolution and my view of anarchism and anarchy is the major reason why. This is because if anarchy is our context, as I and my sources, I would argue, suggest, then no revolution is needed to create it — albeit some may from time to time be needed to attack or topple petty human interests which obstruct or attempt to frustrate wider and more important anarchist truths. Here our evolution is towards fitting in with the universe, with existence, as it actually exists which is something other than the often egotistical

and narcissistic human experience of ourselves we daily are in receipt of. As you will grow tired of me saying, the universe is the context for us, we are not the context for it.

This I see as the spiritual and philosophical context of our lives and it is an anarchistic context. As a consequence, one aspect of the self-education process that is anarchism should be humility and even if the whole of humanity became more appropriately humble that would be a big step forward in the conscious, self-actualised, responsible anarchisation of the people of the earth. Yet no one will be ever be able to force all people everywhere to do this, no revolution will ever anarchise the world. And, of course, it is not anarchism to want to do this. It is, in the end, simply a process of self-awareness, self-knowledge, self-education, of observation and of being awake to the things you experience and of taking responsibility for that. And then passing it on. If the world is ever to become anarchist politically it will only be because it has evolved that way as people awake from the dream of human self-importance.

Dream Conversation About Interpretation

Over the past few years of my wandering I have become a person very aware of interpretation. Indeed, I have become very aware that intellectual life, thought, would not and could not take place without it. I have come to understand, if that is not also to believe, that human beings are hermeneutic beings. We live by interpreting. I came to this realisation slowly, over maybe two decades, if that is not to say that simply in the process of half a century this was where I ended up. Indeed, I find it very, very mysterious how many of the, to me, quite random and disparate sources I have dipped into over the years come to say the same thing. Whether you are a German philosopher influenced by materialism, a Japanese inheritor of an Indian spirituality, an Austrian philosopher once revered by logical positivists, some Chinese ancients seeking to survive the invention of civilisation, a French Algerian academic regarded by others as a willful obfuscator or an American liberal philosopher and theologian you all seem to say the same thing to me which is: life and reality are genuine and authentic things which the human mind has covered over in fictions, illusions, habits, it has labelled truths, knowledge, understandings — in error. All you need do now is let them go. See through them!

The latter figure there in my arbitrary list is the American emeritus professor of both theology and philosophy, Jack Caputo. One day some weeks ago I randomly bought a copy of his quite cheap book simply titled *Hermeneutics*. It must have affected me quite a lot because one afternoon not long after I found myself dreaming of a conversation he and an imaginary interlocutor were having. From what I can remember, it went something like this:

Imaginary Interlocutor: We live in a world of facts, right? Do you agree with that?

Jack Caputo: Ask yourself, how many facts are there around you right now? You see the problem.

We have to specify the terms, the framework. Are you counting noses or chairs or subatomic particles — or what? We need an interpretation before we can start counting. The theory that everything is a matter of interpretation is called hermeneutics.

II: Everything is a matter of interpretation?

JC: Every matter of fact is a matter of interpretation that picks out the facts.

II: So you don't think that there are simply facts then?

JC: In hermeneutics we defend the idea that there are no pure facts. Behind every interpretation lies another interpretation. We never reach an understanding of anything that is not an interpretation... In hermeneutics, I like to say, interpretation goes all the way down.

II: But if everything is interpretation how can there be any facts?

JC: Interpretations go all the way down but some interpretations are better than others... It is important to hold both these thoughts in our heads at the same time.

II: So you're saying that interpreting helps us to find the facts?

JC: To understand anything at all requires having an angle on it, a perspective, an interpretive slant, in the absence of which we would just not understand, period. II: It sounds like you're saying that facts are related to us. Can that be right?

JC: The facts you find are a function of the interests you have, and disinterested interpretations are nowhere to be found.

II: So what is this “hermeneutics” your book is about then?

JC: Hermeneutics is a theory of truth – it describes the nature of truth as something that is acquired only through interpretation – and of being human, because it claims that interpretation lies at the heart of who we are as human beings.

II: Where do objectivity and facts fit into this?

JC: When we are hermeneutic we deconstruct the idea of pure objectivity or pure facts and replace it with the distinction between good interpretations and bad ones.

II: Deconstruct?

JC: This is a technical term in one vocabulary of hermeneutics. Let’s just say that deconstruction is the theory that all our beliefs and practices are constructions, and that whatever is constructed is de-constructible, and that whatever is de-constructible is also re-constructible, which would mean that all our beliefs and practices are re-interpretable.

II: Hmm, OK. So why should I not conclude that what you’re saying is that we make things up as we go along?

JC: Hermeneutics stresses that we do not begin from scratch; we begin from an inherited situation that is already up and running... In radical hermeneutics, we take the point of view of the outliers, the outsiders, the ones whose views have been neglected or excluded. Deconstructors cultivate a congenial disposition to look at things otherwise.

II: So sort of contrarians then. Do you believe in objectivity?

JC: I believe that there are good reasons to believe one thing rather than the other.

II: OK. So do you think that wrong interpretations should be got rid of where, for example, we can prove they are wrong?

JC: Do you say that you have read my book? I am not trying to abolish interpretations (which is absolutism)... but to multiply them.

II: Yes, I have read your book but it left me with plenty of questions as you can see. You start in your discussion of hermeneutics with Martin Heidegger. What is the first insight on hermeneutics we get from Heidegger in your view?

JC: Well, to answer that question, Heidegger talks about “facticity” or “factual life” in his early years at Freiburg University after World War 1. By facticity, or factual life, Heidegger meant how we live, concrete experience. Factual life meant a form of life, a way of living in the world, a mode of “being-in-the-world,” as he called it himself. “Factual” does not mean a matter of fact but of interpretation. The hermeneutic ‘how’ refers to how we interpret our lives and our world and our ‘being-with’ one another in our world. Interpretation is not an isolated act, one thing among many that we do; it is what we are, the pivot, the crux of our being. Interpretation adjusts the settings of our being-in-the-world; it tunes the way we are attuned to the world. Interpretation is a world-making where the world is where and how we dwell. We are not ‘in’ the world the way water is in a glass but by living and dwelling there.

II: So would I be right in thinking that interpretation here is not a solitary act?

JC: Yes, you would. Whenever, for example, I open my mouth it is not just I myself doing the talking but rather something greater than me; it is life itself coming to words. Hermeneutics taps into a deeper, prior self-interpretation.

II: This sounds kind of reflexive. Can you expand on that aspect a little more?

- JC: Certainly. The being we intend to interpret in hermeneutics is itself the being who interprets, the being whose very Being is to interpret itself — and consequently to interpret others, with whom it is bound, and the world in which it is embedded. Hermeneutics is interpretation interpreting itself. We are the beings who make our Being a matter of interpretation, who put our Being into question.
- II: OK, I think I get it. But let me ask you this: If ‘hermeneutics is interpretation interpreting itself’ where does that leave ‘the way things are’, that which we seek to interpret?
- JC: The work of hermeneutics is to work out our ‘always and already being interpreted’, to bring it to the forefront or to the surface. It requires a certain ability to read between the lines of life and track down what is being presupposed, what is not being said explicitly. Hermeneutics does not seek to find some pure, eternal ahistorical essence but rather to tap into the deepest roots of our inherited historical existence. Hermeneutics is not a matter of making a presuppositionless beginning but of rethinking the beginning with which we originally began. Hermeneutics does not begin with nothing; it begins with everything.
- II: OK. So on this “no ahistorical essence” bit: if we say that something ‘is’ something then what does this ‘is’ mean?
- JC: The is is the how; the is is the as.
- II: Say what? Can you expand on that a little more please. This stuff isn’t easy!
- JC: OK, think of it this way. There is no pure, uninterpreted fact of the matter which is layered over with an interpretation. Being-in-the-world is not a matter of pure, disinterested consciousness which neutralizes the world into a set of pale, impersonal objects. It is a matter of being deeply engaged with the world of everyday concerns. Second, things are parts of wholes, belonging to a holistic and concatenated system. The whole makes sense (has significance) in terms of the parts, and the parts in terms of the whole. They form a ‘hermeneutic circle’ of part and whole. Third, being-in-the-world is always and already being-with others. Fourthly, things are not interpretation-free-things-in-themselves. They are the fruit of another interpretation, the result of suspending the movements of everyday life and taking a thing differently, as a measurable spatio-temporal object.
- II: If I may say so, you seem to see human beings doing ‘interpretation’ everywhere. Why?
- JC: Because interpretation is not something we do. Interpretation is what we are.
- II: OK. But to step back a little: Heidegger talks about something he calls ‘Dasein’ in your discussion of him which we might translate as ‘being-there’. What is the point of this term? It seems quite important to him.
- JC: The essence of Dasein lies in its existence, of having-to-be-the-there, the being that I myself am uniquely called to be.
- II: Hmm. How does this relate to something like conscience?
- JC: I would put it in terms that the call of conscience is not the call of God but the call of the self to itself, calling the (inauthentic) self back to its (authentic) self. In other words to know that we are not a finished actuality but a being-possible.
- II: I like how you’ve put that! Very good. So its a matter of authenticity then? How does authentic interpretation occur? JC: Authentic interpretations are modifications of inherited interpretations.
- II: But according to what scheme?
- JC: An interpretation projects the horizon within which things can appear as the things that they are. The various fields of study are each set within an interpretive frame (an ‘understanding

of Being') which sets or fixes the horizon of appearance for entities in that domain. Each field is staked out in advance by its own 'fundamental concepts' — like life in biology, language in literature, space-time in physics, etc. Progress then is not linear but revolutionary, a shift in the hermeneutic horizon. The 'fundamental concepts' (horizons), then, are not eternal or atemporal forms but historical-temporal projections. There has been an underlying and unquestioned understanding of Being as presence, rest, stasis, stability, while movement and becoming are denigrated as imperfections. But, in fact, all our categories are temporal.

II: Hmm, that's very interesting. That seems to envision our understandings as simply our moving the goalposts through time to suit our needs. Is hermeneutics a set of rules or a method for how to interpret correctly?

JC: No, no, not at all! It is about the truth that eludes method. Hermeneutics does not supply a template that can be transcribed into a particular discipline. It is a philosophy of how understanding is reached. Hermeneutics is not the police.

II: OK, OK, fair enough. I want to come back to subjects and objects if I may because I want to understand what you are saying in reference to our inherited ways of understanding. How does hermeneutics handle them?

JC: Let us consider Hans-Georg Gadamer who, of course, I also mention in the book. Gadamer sets out a phenomenology of play as a model that dissolves the sharp distinction made between the disinterested aesthetic subject and the pure aesthetic object. The game has rules, and so the field has boundaries, which set the tensions of the play. So, by play, Gadamer does not mean 'anything goes' or random arbitrary motion, but rule-governed activity. Without the rules, we would not have more play but no play at all. Play is made possible by the rules, by exercising a spontaneity, innovativeness and creativity within individual situations that do not themselves have rules. Key here is that a player participates; the observer merely looks at. Here the task is not to observe but to experience the play of the game which is its truth. What sort of truth? The truth of a world-disclosure, of a form of life, of a mode of being-in-the-world, a truth it alone is uniquely able to open up, and a truth that is visited upon me as player of the game (existential truth). By losing myself in the play, I regain myself as transformed by the work. We should not ask what does this thing mean but how do we play it? Players play the play and are in turn played by the play. Do you see?

II: Yes, that's a very powerful metaphor and a strong part of the book I think. But something else occurs to me. You talk about play which seems a kind of context for what takes place. In addition, both hermeneutics and interpretation seem very textual, even literary, ideas. Where do authors stand in this, authors who write things and give them meanings, where understanding this is what we would normally call 'making sense'?

JC: If the play's the thing then, for Gadamer, the 'intentions of the author' are no longer normative for the interpretation of the work. Why? First of all, it would in fact be impossible to reconstruct what is in someone's mind, not to mention the problem posed when an author perhaps later changes their mind (as, in fact, happened with Heidegger who later tried to change the meaning of his earlier work). Second, works do not have an absolute sense but a contextual sense whose meaning is fixed by being fitted to a changing context. What something means is context-dependent; it is a function of both the works themselves and the context in which they are repeated.

II: Gadamer is trying to pretend authors don't exist then or to relativise their authority?

- JC: Gadamer, I think, was not trying to destroy every last vestige of the author or agent anymore than he is trying to destroy every trace of objectivity. The intentions of the author are not nothing; they belong to a first reading. But it cannot be a normative interpretation; it is never a final reading. It belongs to the very structure of a text to be recontextualizable again and again. You just can't fix meanings or readings. That's not how they work, not in their nature.
- II: Can you give me an example to show how that works?
- JC: Sure. If the words of the founders of the USA and the writers of the American Constitution were confined to the intentions of their authors, then slavery would never have been abolished, and women and unpropertied men would never have gained the right to vote. Laws have to be structurally appealable and repealable, constitutions amendable, codes of conduct revisable, religious myths demythologizable. Our understanding of marriage has evolved so that now we have both interracial and even same sex marriage. Even marriage has a history, not an essence. The misguided attempt to be literally loyal to the past makes the past into a monster, closes down the future and deprives tradition of its inherent ability to renew itself. Texts, including anything that can be read as a text, are like children — they grow up, leave the nest and lead a life of their own: that's what's supposed to happen.
- II: OK, I see what you are saying. It makes sense as far as it goes. But how then do we decide what something says? Or are you saying a text doesn't say anything — or that it says what we decide right now?
- JC: What does a book say? Not a thing. Sit there with it in front of you as long as you like, listen very carefully, and it won't say a word. It does not actually say (or mean) anything until someone reads it, just the way a score does not make music until someone plays it. When authors write something down they produce a set of inscriptions, written signs, which are so many potentialities that can be actualized again and again. The very idea of writing means the author enters into the play of language that was already running before they arrived, deploying denotations and connotations that will run off in new directions when the text finds itself in a new context. Put simply: there's no freeze frame. The author is playing the language but the language is no less playing the author as well as its play taking place behind the author's back. When you play a game you don't control the game; you are merely a participant in the game.
- II: Ah, so its the Gadamer thing again. Play. The trouble is, as far as I can see, this doesn't say much good about the notion of truth. Truth is becoming less 'what is true' and more 'what is true in this context'. Any thought about that?
- JC: Yes, certainly. Truth, and this is true for both Heidegger and Gadamer, is both existential, since we are personally engaged with the tradition that bequeathes it to us, we belong to it, and phenomenological, since it is a new configuration of the world, a new figure of life, a new configuration of our lived experience.
- II: OK. And what would be a good model for this kind of truth?
- JC: Conversation, the play of the dialogue, the plasticity of discourse, is the central operative model of hermeneutics (and so the truth that comes from it) for Gadamer. We address things with questions but they in turn answer back and put us in question. Every serious question puts us in question in return. So the answer is conversation.
- II: What about neutrality? Its often said you can't tell the truth if you're biased.
- JC: Conversation is not a methodology but a way of avoiding misunderstanding. Take a search for historical truth as an example. 'Neutrality', were it even possible, would make no sense

because the historical distance that separates contemporary sensibilities from the past is creative and productive — which brings new questions to bear upon the past. (Example: feminist studies.) Otherwise, historians would be like people with a tin ear judging a music competition. They must approach the past as a conversation partner looking for answers, and that demands having a living question to begin with, having something that matters, along with a willingness to be put into question by the answer that comes back. So you need to inhabit the conversation model to understand this point of view and realise what hermeneutics says about this.

- II: Yes, I'm doing my best to try and follow where you are going with this but its all a bit new to me. This seems a matter of relatability and tradition as you explain it there then rather than a subject beholding objects. Is that on the right track?
- JC: What I would like to say is that we belong to the thing we are trying to talk about . We stand downstream in the history of its effects. There is a consciousness that understands that it stands in and is formed by the history that it is trying to understand. Standing in that flow is how we have access to it in the first place. The tradition, if I may call it that, is never simply over; nothing is ever simply dead. The tradition is us, part of our being, where we have come from, and we are reflecting upon it with the resources that it itself has given us.
- II: Ah, now that is interesting. I like the idea we are part of the things, or, perhaps, the tradition, that we are talking about. It seems a lot less cut up and dissected into discrete objects — almost like everything is part of everything else. So tell me: How are the language we must use and the form of being you have spoken about implicated in this? JC: Well, to go back once more to Gadamer. He said, "Being that can be understood is language." Heidegger said, "Language is the house of being." Here language is not a prison, the lack of language is. Nothing will be understood without language. Here even silence is a gap, an empty space, a caesura that occurs within language. Yet there is a mysticity, an unexplainability, to this, something beyond grasping. For can we not say that whatever we say is not true (inadequate) and whatever we do not say (when we admit our inability to ever comprehensively understand) is? In language we live and move and have our being yet as participants in something both before and after us which we use but never completely control rather than as all-knowing outside observers.
- II: Hmm, mystical. So you are saying that even as we can change and adapt language it can change us, our being [understood as a verb], too?
- JC: I'm saying that a genuine question is lost for an answer and puts the questioner in question. We do not 'understand' in the hermeneutic sense if we are not changed. If you can't do it, you don't get it, or rather it has not got you. It is a matter of being and change.
- II: OK. Now as I read your book I noted that it makes use of Jacques Derrida, a person many academics in certain traditionalist places seem not to have liked. Why is this and what does he have to do with hermeneutics?
- JC: OK, let's get into Derrida. In the 1960s Derrida had a job preparing students wanting to enter into philosophy. To do this they had to pass an exam where they needed to show both a detailed knowledge of European philosophy (Descartes, Kant, Hegel, etc..) but also show stunning originality in doing so. Derrida's way of dealing with this was to push the students to undertake a reading of philosophy that would be a punishingly meticulous reconstruction of the original, but so close, so micrological, as to expose the hidden presuppositions in the text, which would in turn expose a conflict. Derrida's hypothesis, from which his fame and infamy

both spring, was that the text is implicitly divided against itself, that the presuppositions push against the very positions pursued in the text, which a close reading would make explicit. If you dig deep enough, you will hit conflict, not an underlying unity. A close reconstruction becomes a deconstruction. Now that spells trouble for hermeneutics as I've discussed it so far with you but much more so for those who wouldn't even accept my rhetoric up to this point.

- II: So is Derrida following the hermeneutical agenda you are laying out here or going against it?
- JC: Derrida seems to have thought he was critiquing the hermeneutical agenda but I prefer to think of him as radicalizing it further. Derrida seems to think of hermeneutics as he found it as talk about a code to crack the meaning of things. As an idea, he doesn't like that. Hence why he argues that texts deconstruct themselves meaning that codes obfuscate themselves. The key point here, though, is that Derrida himself would insist that he is actually not doing anything. His point is that the text itself is auto-disruptive. So don't blame him, blame texts!
- II: So what is Derrida actually getting at if he is not doing anything? JC: It starts with context which I have already mentioned in my answers to you. Derrida agrees there is always a context, be it the original or current one. Or, as Derrida puts it himself, 'there is nothing outside of the text', nothing without a context, nothing that is ever non-contextual, no reference is ever made without or outside of a textual system of references. This statement 'there is nothing outside of the text' actually became notorious because it was not read in context, that is, precisely in violation of what it itself was saying! The statement was wildly misconstrued to mean that Derrida doubted or denied the existence of the world or maintained that there is nothing outside of words (the most stupid reading). However, Derrida was saying that we can never understand what the words are talking about without the words, or without some sort of way to signify in the most general sense, which is what the word 'text' means here. You cannot sneak around the language to get a supposedly naked reality; even when you want to signify something, you make use of a system of signifiers. When you learn to speak a second language you have widened your world rather than built yourself a second prison to enclose the first.
- So Derrida is not thinking that we are locked up in a prison house of words called language. Beyond the first reading of the author I spoke about previously, which Derrida acknowledges, he conceives of a second which seeks something at work in the text behind the author's back, something that the author did not see coming. As Derrida himself writes, 'The writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely'. Derrida sees that the problem, of course, is that our words are not our own; we do not own them and cannot stipulate what they mean. We did not make them up (even, in fact, if we did) and they are not our private property. They are the common property of the language that was already running when we first opened our mouths, the one we heard and learned by miming. As soon as we use a system of signs, we sign on to a whole string of associations and connotations of which we are not the author. If I say that English is my first language it is not because it belongs to me but because I belong to it. I enter into something already up and running, I have agreed to a whole take on (interpretation of) the world. To take up language is to dive into the waters of a system by which I am also inundated.
- II: So, if you like, we dive into the stream of language. But words and texts have meanings, yes? There is an original we should take note of despite talk of 'first readings'?
- JC: Derrida thinks that people should guard against the illusion that the original really is original. The so-called original has not dropped from the sky, it, too, is the effect of everything that

precedes it, of the systems of signification of which it was a part. There never was anything that was originally original. (The same as saying there is nothing without a conditioning context, in fact.) Thus, we come to a Derridean point: 'There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond Man and Humanism, the name of Man being the name of that being who has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play'.

II: I'm guessing that Derrida chooses the second over the first?

JC: And you would be wrong! Derrida thinks that it is never a question of choosing between the one and the other, between 'original Truth' and 'no Truth' with a capitalised "T", between deciphering "the meaning" and interpolating and inventing new meanings. Interpretation is always conducted in the space between (inter) the two interpretations of interpretation. What this perhaps means is that interpretation happens as intervention; an interpretation is an event of intervention upon the conventional. This, of course, is never *ex nihilo*. An interpretation is always a negotiation. An interpretation happens in the space between, the space between the regular and irregular, the commensurable and the incommensurable, the normalized and exceptional, the centre and the margins, the same and the other, the possible and the impossible, the conditional or unconditional.

II: I think I get that but I see an issue here which I would like you to address. How do words relate to the world?

JC: We may say that in hermeneutical thinking, particularly the radical hermeneutical thinking of Derrida, words are not hard-wired to the world or to reality. But that does not mean that words do not have a reference to the world. It just means that words do not have a reference to the world independently of their difference from one another. No reference without difference. Take colour theory, for example. Colours are what they are because they are not other colours. Colour theory is relational all the way down. Language works the same way, which is why the meaning of a given word or phrase or sentence is irreducibly contextual. Taken out of the (con)text, we can make anybody say pretty much anything we want. Without some context, words just don't work, they collapse under the stress. Editions, redactions, citations, all are a function of differential differences. So, in hermeneutics, language is no longer treated in the classical humanist manner as the way an inner consciousness expresses itself in outer signs which signify concepts and refer, simply, to reality.

II: I like that but I can't help noticing that it's all context again. Why the ubiquity of context in hermeneutics?

JC: Ask yourself a question: How many words are there in the English language? How many rules of grammar (ways to combine the words) are there in the English language? How many sentences are there in the English language? By the time we get to the possible sentences we realise that we will never stop counting. Not as long as we have to do with a living language which finds ways to create on a constant basis. The new, the innovative, is part of the process. The reason for that unlimited number of new sentences is the inextinguishable flow of time which keeps changing the... yes you guessed it... the context! We can't step in the same linguistic river twice. Even if I repeat the same thing to the same audience using the same words then, at the very least, the time has changed and a subtle shift has happened. American

musician John Cage realised the very same thing when, in 1952, he composed the piece 4'33", a so-called 'silent piece' (not what Cage thought) in which the performer, following the score which Cage had meticulously produced, made no sounds at all in three ordered movements. The point was not that the performer on stage was doing nothing but that every time the piece was performed the context was completely different, the ambient noises which could be heard in the absence of performed sounds were always different. 4'33", as it were, was different every time. Time, quite literally and constantly, changes everything.

II: Language is sometimes talked of as a matter of structure and in talking earlier of 'no reference without difference' you can be seen to be talking structurally, of language as a structure of differences. How do your reflections about time interact with that notion?

JC: The characteristic feature of contemporary, perhaps postmodern or radical, hermeneutics is its affirmation of unforeseeable openings, surprising events, unprogrammable effects. Derrida criticises the structural linguist Ferdinand de Saussure by asserting that there is no finite, atemporal set of rules that could contain or anticipate the infinity of possible utterances written or spoken in time. This is because, in time, we cannot see what is coming, not fully or perfectly. So, the 'event' has more teeth to it than the structuralist is prepared to admit. The linguistic event is not just the instance of a rule; it is idiosyncratic and unanticipatable; not lower than the universal but higher. So 'the rules' (any rules) are just another effect of the system, just as time-bound. The rules do not absolutely regulate the system because they do not exist outside or above the system, they are produced (in time which is both context and change) by the system; they are not essences governing the system but temporal effects of it. In short, time cuts deeper than structure.

II: How does this play out for us as interpreters?

JC: It means that humans do not sort through every possible combination of a complex series of 0s and 1s until they finally hit the right one. They interpret.

II: Haha, quite. I must say, you give a good account of yourself but this could all sound very weak when contrasted with those who talk about 'reality' and 'a necessary objectivity' and say things like 'it is the case that some things are true in ways that are not to do with how we talk or what we think'. How do you respond to this?

JC: Nietzsche once wrote, 'God is dead and we have killed him'. Notice that he does not say 'God does not exist' or 'There is no God'. He avoids making the metaphysical statement about something called 'the nature of reality'. He is saying that God is a fictitious perspective. But you can't hold that against God. So is everything else. What matters is that the fiction has worn out. So talking of hermeneutics being 'weak' is actually quite apt and Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo would agree that such thought is 'weak' in comparison to former talk but that this is not thereby a bad thing. Vattimo, after the death of the fiction of God and the absolutes that he was once thought to guarantee, sees the nihilism that critics of this move sometimes call it as the history of the weakening of these structures, of their becoming nothing, their becoming unbelievable, which, for him, is an emancipatory development. The name of this weakening is hermeneutics, that is, the displacement of objective absolutizing thinking by interpretation. This can easily be seen as 'weak' depending on your context but, in hermeneutics, your task is not to out-argue but to out-narrate, to tell a better story. So the ultimate nature of reality (ontology, metaphysics) weakens into interpretations. Epistemology (the studying of knowing and what and how we know) turns into conversation, the kind I mentioned earlier which I got from Gadamer. Principles must be weakened into a more pli-

able, plastic, practical wisdom. Political principles bequeathed from grandiose metaphysical notions become the belief that everybody has a point of view which, in the political realm itself, becomes the idea of democracy. Power, once accorded only to those in heaven or those designated their representatives, now falls to Earth. The problem for this 'weak thought' is not that people have a perspective but that anyone might hold that there was an absolutist point of view over and above any or every particular individual. This, for the 'weak' hermeneutic thinkers, is a better story than that one some think 'strong'.

II: What is wrong with the 'strong' thinking that it needs to be 'weakened'? Why is the 'weak' story a better story?

JC: For this we turn to the American pragmatist Richard Rorty. Rorty regarded the 'strong' talk not as wrong talk but as hype, things that we simply don't need to say to get by. To say a statement represents a fact just means that holding that belief works. Rorty does not think that we need transcendental or metaphysical backup and neither do we need to talk about the essence of things or talk about how 'grounded' we are. As I explained in my last answer, the fiction of God, or any God substitute, what Rorty talked about as 'the desire to escape time and chance', has worn out. And good riddance, thinks Rorty. If people needed it in past contexts, we don't now. So there is no form of speech or writing which gets us any closer to 'how things are' than another and if you thought that this was what philosophy (or even science) was well, sorry, you're mistaken. Philosophy (or science) is just a form of writing or a way of talking and not a special method which gets us to 'the Truth' or 'Reality' as opposed to 'opinion' or 'conversation'. Philosophers (and scientists) are just people who talk in certain ways about certain subjects and who are familiar with particular questions and a possible range of answers to them. Occasionally, they appear to have solved problems. So, instead of talking about Truth or Objectivity, let's just talk about inter-subjective agreement and let it go at that. We don't need the grandiose hype and bluster. Weak thinking is better thinking.

II: So 'strong thought' is wrong thought?

JC: I'll address this with reference to Rorty again. The beliefs we hold, thought Rorty, are contingent upon an accident of birth. If you were born in Mecca or Tuvalu or Vladivostok or Mogadishu or Tierra del Fuego or Nunavut you wouldn't be the person you are, with the beliefs you hold, today. (And if you were born in one of those places then consider the others!) This contingency of birth puts a particular language on our tongue, certain ideas in our head and particular books in our libraries (assuming we even have libraries). Appreciating the contingency of our birth and the, shall we say, somewhat accidental nature of our beliefs implies holding them with a certain irony, with just enough diffidence and distance to keep them revisable whilst also treating them as the (unavoidable) tools we have been given. Beliefs here are successful interpretations but they are successful interpretations with different histories rather than the discovery of essences or foundations. We can, of course, hope for agreement and consensus across cultural and national boundaries (here solidarity based on the conversation I have been talking about is very important) but we do not need Gods, or God substitutes, to do any of this. So is strong thought wrong thought? Its unnecessary thought. Its thought just as contingent and historical as any other.

II: That's really interesting and I'd like to discuss this more but, for now, I need to get going. How would you summarise what you've been saying?

JC: My take away line in all this is that interpretation goes all the way down. We never escape from its sticky web because its not something we do but what we are. We are a quote from

Saint Augustine, 'I have become a great question to myself'. Life is that question. The best answer hermeneutics has to the question of who we are is that we are that question. The question is the answer .

II: And everything else?

JC: We are people with practices. When it comes to hermeneutics the right question is, 'These are good practices, but how do they work in theory?'. We start with us where we are in time and space and not from some atemporal God position that is a fiction. When the earlier Heidegger said we have a vague pre-understanding of something he knew not what – Being? God? World? – something very elemental that we spend our time trying to articulate, that's hermeneutics. One last time: interpretation goes all the way down. Hermeneutics situates itself precisely where we are plugged into the world, engaged in and by and with the world, and its task is to let that come into words. Hermeneutics seeks some kind of non-objectifying discourse, some way of speaking not about but from out of our experience of the world.

Anarchist Liturgy II: The Dhammapada

Anarchist liturgy. Philosophical anarchist liturgy. A philosophical anarchist liturgy that serves to spiritually retool every human being. As I was walking around the area yesterday on my regular round it was once again borne in on me what the problem of the world actually is: its the hearts of Men. It is what the human being is. But the human being is not what the human being has to be. Human beings have adapted to almost every environment this world provides. Our flexibility and adaptability is one of our greatest characteristics. Yet that is also a weakness for it means we can be bent and shaped into any number of destructive forms. One of these forms, the most destructive of all, is mass civilisation. It now seems clear that a great mass of life on this planet, including our own, will eventually and inevitably die of civilisation. When we all lived in caves or even huts in small groups there was no prospect that the species could damage the world or affect it in an overarching way. It was impossible. Such a lifestyle was self-limiting. But civilised human beings focused on capitalist goals who care about profit more than effects, now they are well able to destroy on a much grander scale. If you create a life where cars and planes and handheld communications devices and industrial food production facilities and international power grids and vast sewerage and waste disposal operations are essential to its survival then that is going to have effects. Bad effects. If you take no notice unless or until those effects are lapping at your personal front door you may find that that is too late.

But I think you know, by now, that the apocalyptic environmental stories only carry so much weight with me. There's nothing permanent or necessary about us in this universe of ours. The entire history of our existence will be an insignificant and pointless speck in time. But, for now, some of us are alive and every day a few hundred thousand more are born. What we need, it occurs to me, is a better ethos than "Be born, consume, die". A life of consumption and possession, of amassing stuff because more stuff means you are higher up some imaginary pecking order, is, to be colloquial about it, dumb as fuck. All any human being has ever needed is enough. No human being has ever been richer than the one who harmonised with nature, who felt connected to the biological place they come from, who could sit in peace. The human attractions to civilisation, to technology, to mass organisation — all of which lead to inequality and control — are fatal attractions. It would be the same with any species which grew too big, which pooled its resources to levels of world-altering significance. We are doing it to ourselves even as I write. But most of us don't care because although we are the smartest things that ever lived on this planet we are not smart enough to care about it or even ourselves.

The number of people I come across in my daily roaming the Internet who imagine that life that is not like our modern, civilised life is an impossibility is staggering. It is very rare I meet someone who can even imagine life without civilisation and its trappings and many of those, too, would not want to live life without them. The concept of having few needs is completely opposed to all they have been taught and, like well programmed individuals, they obey the imperatives of this most basic of civilised programming absolutely. They are killing and enslaving us all, just as they were always meant to. "Progress," as it is perversely and inaccurately called, must not be

stopped. But it must be stopped if one cares about life on earth because our way of living, our way of being, is killing everything. On the one hand, as has been explained before, this is just anarchy going about its business in ways it cares not how. But, on the other hand, its not as if we have to live like this. And so alternatives become apparent.

Garbage in, garbage out is a fairly widespread aphorism and most would acknowledge its truth. But that is how we human beings live on earth. Many of us, not least myself, have lived the majority of our lives as human garbage. We have lived “without virtue” to phrase this in more ancient and more virtue cognisant ways. But even today there are some happy few who take note of their place in the universe and appreciate the need to live virtuously, peacefully, harmoniously, anarchically in that spiritual way which has been detailed in the third of my now four books which proclaim “there is nothing to stick to”. It struck me that what we need is an anarchist liturgy which articulates this way to be, a way not willingly destructive or careless, a way which recognises an appropriate sense of place and [lack of] significance, a modest, humble way that is happy with enough. And so I read the Dhammapada, thought about it and wrote...

Thought from our thoughts,
Life from our mind.
This is the way.

Harmony instead of enmity,
Together not apart.
This is the way.

To live as if you were in competition with everything else
Is a disease of the mind.
This is not the way.

Selfish pleasures
Without concern for harmony:
This is not the way.

When selfish pleasure is not your goal,
When harmony is achieved,
When virtue is in sight,
This is the way.

To understand that truth is what is real
And that what is not real is not:
This is the way.

A well-ordered mind
Protects you from uncontrolled passions.
This is the way.

To think and act at odds with the world is to suffer:
This is not the way.
To think and act in harmony with the world Is not to suffer:
This is the way.
To speak few words and yet
To live according to those words,

Free from passions, free from hate, free from illusions of the mind,
A being that is free from cravings:
This is the way.

To be watchful
And not to be unwatchful:
This is the way.

High thought,
Deep contemplation,
Self-possession:
This is the way.

Be careful about what you think,
Avoid foolishness and ignorance.
This is the way.

To be watchful among the unwatchful,
To be careful in what one thinks:
This is the way.
To have a mind that is straight as an arrow:
This is the way.

To have a mind that is self-controlled,
A matter of self-possession,
This is the way.
A mind that is in harmony,
That does not seek selfish progress,
This is the way.

A right directed mind
Of virtue and selfless interaction,
This is the way.

To be the foam of a wave
Or the shadow of a mirage:
This is the way.

To have enough but not to take away from others
Or to destroy the whole:
This is the way.

Like the scent of a flower,
The perfume of virtue travels on the wings of the wind to the ends of the world:
This is the way.

Even as flowers grow on rubbish heaps by the side of the road:
This is the way.

Better to be alone than spend time in the company of fools:
This is the way.

To live an unvirtuous life seems sweet to the fool
Until the reaction comes with its pain and suffering.

Then the fruits of wrongdoing must be eaten by that fool.
Better, then, to be one who is wise,
Who never has to repent of, or suffer from, one's life.
This is the way.

Do not wish for reputation,
Do not wish for presidency,
Do not wish for authority,
Do not wish for veneration amongst people:
This is the way.

Treat one who tells you of your faults
As if they had told you of hidden treasure.
Let yourself be admonished,
Let yourself be instructed,
Let yourself be restrained from what is wrong:
This is the way.

To keep out of the company of those who have ugly souls,
To avoid those who would do evil,
But to seek out the beautiful:
This is the way.

What is real wealth?
To drink the waters of truth,
To rest in joy,
To have a peaceful mind,
To separate what is from what is not.
This is the way.

Self-control and self-possession:
This is the way.
To not be moved by either praise or blame:
This is the way.

To remain unmoved by the tumult of existence,
To exist like a lake that is pure, peaceful and deep:
This is the way.

To not waste the currency of time on the things of desire,
To surrender all attachments:
This is the way.

To live without calculation,
To exist without profit or loss:
This is the way.
Free from possessions,
Free from desires,
Free from whatever darkens the mind:
This is the way.

Immortality from non-attachment,
Joy from serenity,
Peaceful harmony from self-possession:
This is the way.

The end of the journey is infinity,
Freedom from all sorrows,
Freedom from all fetters,
An identity that is no more:
This is the way.

Your home is not your home,
Your place is not your place,
Your story is not your story:
This is the way.

Thoughts at peace,
Words at peace,
Life at peace:
This is the way.
To not care where you live,
To not care what you have,
To not care how you are regarded or where you stand in relation to other people,
To be self-possessed, simple and authentic:
This is the way.

Better one single day of life lived in virtue and deep contemplation,
Than 100 years of vice, possession and acquisition.
This is the way.

Arising and passing away,
Coming and going,
Back and forth:
This is the way.

To see the path,
And no longer to see the illusions:
This is the way.

Little by little the water drops of evil fill the jar.
Instead, fill the jar with the water drops of goodness:
This is the way.

Genuine peace is real wealth,
And even as the merchant carrying their wealth without escort
Avoids the dangers of the road,
So you too should guard this wealth jealously.
This is the way.

To revere and respect life:
This is the way.

To be able to live in peace and quietness:

This is the way.

To be self-controlled:

This is the way.

The whole world is destined for destruction,
Nothing is permanent and all is forever changing,
All around there is decay, corruption, destruction, dissolution,
For all life ends in death.

This is the way.

The body decays and dies,
But nature's virtue goes on and on forever.

This is the way.

Once the fever of craving is past,
The mortal mind goes to the joy of immortal enlightenment.

This is the way.

Only a person can master themselves,
And if they cannot master themselves then who can?

This is the way.

Every step is on the path,
But there are right paths and there are wrong paths,
There are paths that lead to darkness,
And there are paths that lead to light.
If you can see this world as but a bubble of froth
And as an illusion of an appearance,
Then you will be walking on the right path
And this will lead you to enlightenment.

This is the way.

To wander through the pathless ways of the infinite,
Unattached and unconcerned,

This is the way.

To be awake and to watch,
To find peace in contemplation,
To be calm and steady,
To find joy in renunciation:

This is the way.

It is not a sin to be a hermit,
An ascetic from the world.
Forbearance is the highest sacrifice,
And eternity the highest good.

If you are awake,
Live in peace,
Perfect yourself.

This is the way.

Self-control,
Moderation,
Solitude,
Practice:
This is the way.

When desires go,
Joy comes.
This is the way.

There is no refuge in mountains or forests,
In the sacred groves or at shrines.
These do not free human beings from sorrow.
A true refuge is enlightenment,
Is the truth of what is and what is not.
These are a long lasting refuge.
This is the way.

To live in joy,
Although having nothing,
Living like a spirit of light:
This is the way.
Neither victory
Nor defeat:
This is the way.

Beware lust,
Hate and
Disharmony:
This is the way.

The solitude of silence,
And the joy of quietness:
This is the way.

A watchful life of contemplation,
Which avoids transient pleasures,
Which guards the mind,
Which thinks clearly and concisely:
This is the way.

Don't be bound to pleasure,
And don't be bound to pain,
For the lack of one is sorrow,
And the presence of the other is the same.
The person who is free from pleasure,
Is also free from fear and sorrow.
This is the way.

To be the one who goes upstream,
with determination,

With a will to the infinity of enlightenment:

This is the way.

To be in the bondage of nothing,

To own nothing,

To be attached to nothing,

And so to be connected to everything:

This is the way.

To purify oneself,

To remove the impurities,

To move towards perfection:

This is the way.

Even as rust destroys iron,

So human beings are destroyed,

By the fictions which cling to them.

Cleanliness and attention to self:

This is the way.

There is no path on the outside;

The path is on the inside.

This is the way.

The path is not a violent path,

And peace is the only goal.

This is the way.

Wisdom is not found in the one who talks, talks and talks again;

But if someone is peaceful and loving and fearless then they are called wise.

This is the way.

Where virtue is concerned,

Behaviour is everything.

This is the way.

Flesh withers;

Virtue does not.

This is the way.

To be above good and evil,

To live in chastity from the world,

To live life as a meditation:

This is the way.

The great human being is not the one who kills the most;

It is the one who kills the least who is truly great.

This is the way.

Let me tell you about the way:

There is a way that leads to vision,

A way that confuses confusion.

At the end of this way there is no sorrow,

This way leads away from the world,
But it is you who must make the effort to walk this way
Because you must follow the way to become free.

And this is that way:
Everything is transient,
Everything is sorrow,
Everything is unreal:
This is the way.

To seek what is greater,
And to leave what is less:
This is the way.
Happiness is not found by making others unhappy.
This is the way.

To find joy in love for all beings:
This is the way.

To be able to be alone,
And to rest alone,
And never weary of the great work,
To live in joy,
To master oneself;
This one can live right beside the forest of desires.
This is the way.

A thoughtless pilgrim,
Only raises dust on the road.
This is the way.

Human beings patrol the border between life and death;
Within, without.
The human being should guard lest any moment pass by in carelessness.
This is the way.

To think that right is wrong and wrong is right:
This is not the way.
But to think that wrong is wrong and right is right:
This is the way.

The best of human beings
Endure in silence.
Peace runs through them like a river
And arrows cannot pierce them
For they have self-control.
This is the way.

The best human being is the human being who trains themselves:
This is the way.

The human being is conditioned and chained

By the social fictions of life.
Yet when they remember infinity,
When they remember the teeming, unbounded interconnection,
When they remember that from which they came and to which they will return,
They are unchained and these fictions can no longer hold them.
This is the way.

The harmony of control:
This is the way.

It is no disgrace to travel alone on the way
If one cannot find a wise and compassionate companion.
But if one can find a wise and intelligent friend
Who is good and self-controlled
Then let them travel together.
This is the way.

If you do not stay watchful,
And do not keep your eyes on enlightenment,
Then you risk being snared once more by cravings and desires.
Remain watchful,
Stay alert,
Endure.
This is the way.

Joy in solitude:
This is the way.

If you would be wise
Cut the fetters,
Renounce the life of the world
And start to walk on the way.
Leave pleasures and desires behind.
This is the way.

Leave the past behind;
Leave the future behind;
Leave the present behind;
Go beyond the farther shore and never return:
This is the way.

It is good to control oneself;
It is good to control the eye,
It is good to control the ear,
It is good to control the sense of smell,
It is good to control your taste,
It is good to control the body,
It is good to control your words,
It is good to control your mind,
It is good to control your inner life.

To achieve perfect self-control
Is to leave all sorrow behind.
This is the way.

To regard name and form as unreal things,
To never feel 'this is mine',
To have no sorrow about things that are only fictions:
This one is on the way for
This is the way.

To sail to the land of Enlightenment
You must empty the boat of your life;
For only when empty will that boat sail.

This is the way.
To break all fetters
And loose all bonds,
To join the free flow of existence;
Unbounded,
Unconditioned,
Unlimited:
This is the way.

Peace supreme beyond the transience of time:
This is the way.

Go beyond the stream,
Go with all your soul.
Leave desires behind,
Commit yourself entirely.
With meditation and contemplation
Go over to the far shore,
Attain the supreme vision
Where all fetters are broken.

This is the way.
And remember:
There is no shore!
Not the near one
Nor the far one
Nor both!
This is the way.

Do not cause hurt or harm
By thought
Or word
Or deed:
This is the way.

Enlightenment is not caused by dressing the right way,
having the right family,

Or being in the right social circles.
It is only by the practice and self-discipline of truth and holiness
That one comes to the joy and peace of Enlightenment.
This is the way.

When you see a person seated in worn out garments
Who has no possessions,
Who pays attention,
Whose mind is clear,
Whose conscience is peaceful,
Who bears no ill-will to anyone or anything,
Who desires nothing
In their quiet contemplation:
This is the way.

The one who wanders alone with few desires,
That one knows
This is the way.

When you do not return
Like for Like
But answer violence with gentleness,
Greed with generosity,
Intolerance with tolerance,
Hatred with love:
This is the way.

To have no desire for possession,
To have no care for acquisition:
This is the way.

To wander without a home in this world:
This is the way.

Going and returning,
Changing and recreating:
This is the way.

No future, past or present,
Having nothing,
Wanting nothing:
This is the way.

Don't remember, don't project, don't think.
Don't analyse, don't control, let go.
No past, no future, no now.
No solution, no intention, no attachment.
This is the way.

Meat, Veganism And The Way of All Things

Life is not life
And death is not death.
The way makes no such distinctions.
Things are not as they appear;
Yet neither are they otherwise.
So you should only cease to cherish your opinions.

Take a look around the world in some places today and you will find an increasing desire for veganism. This is often among those best described, in the ideological, partisan West, at least, as those with a bee in their bonnet. They will talk about the horrors of factory farming, the pollution caused by farming that takes place on an industrial scale, the fact that propagating meat on such a large scale is actually a misuse of the land and the terrible conditions the animals are often kept in and, in very many of such things that they say, they will actually have a point. I am not here to tell anyone that vegans have got it all wrong or that what they say bears no resemblance to what goes on in the world. What vegans have done is come to the conclusion that industrial meat production [and, by extension, any meat-eating or farmed products such as eggs or milk and cheese] is so bad that they refuse to take part in it and so they stop eating meat, regarding its production as a cruel and intolerable process. Some, if not many of them, will then go on to tell everyone they meet that if they are meat eaters they are “violent murderers” as I was myself told today upon opening my social media and reading it through bleary eyes. This may sound incontrovertible in the ears of some convinced vegan but I received it as one-eyed hysteria which, to say the least, condensed the issues into a very convenient rhetorical accusation. I replied back to my accuser, as I often do, by pointing out that their comfortable Western life is almost certainly supported and maintained by many such “violent murderers” and left it at that. I did this because the fact is that, even if you don’t eat meat yourself, the majority of people you know probably do and most of the people who are keeping you alive and enabling you to go about your daily life in the relative comfort of Western civilisation likely are meat eaters too. And is it just about meat? I haven’t done a great deal of research into it, but I’m pretty sure a lot of medicines come from animals too. Are vegans against medicine we get through animals or animal experimentation? Perhaps they are and, if so, they are allowed to be. Then it occurs to me that there are “animal products”, a vague and probably surprising category of things that ultimately derive from animals and turn up in the strangest of places. Let’s round all this up by saying that human beings have for millennia seen animals as things they can use to further their own outcomes and serve their purposes. Have they been wrong to do this? By what measure? Of course, I am going to tell you that there is no measure even as I recognise that human beings are those who measure everything as a habit they cannot get out of. Yet one thing I did look into thinking about the issue of veganism was sentience in plants and this, it seems, is not so far-fetched an idea as it might once have been. Plants, no one will deny, are certainly alive and,

for me at least, this is already enough to take such organisms seriously. What's more, plants, as we know, are the basis of ALL life on earth. No plants, no animals: its that simple. Yet even as far back as 1973 researchers were writing books which argued that plants can recognise things, predict things and even communicate [*The Secret Life of Plants* by Tompkins and Bird]. In short, they act in response to their surroundings in a way we would call sentience and perhaps even consciousness. Subsequent research, a growing field of science, has suggested plants can hear, smell, make decisions, have memories, cognition and the ability to learn, feel stress and pain and have social lives. Is this surprising in something which no one would deny is alive? I don't think it should be. Being alive, being an animate object, surely implies certain faculties or abilities even carried out in ways other than the ways in which we carry them out. One vegan I spoke to recently laughed off sentience in plants because "they don't have a brain or a nervous system". This person apparently believed that any sentience or consciousness must, as a rule, be like ours. Thus, they fell into exactly the anthropomorphic trap which honours that which is tolerably like a human being but regards everything else as alien and different – and so as something we can treat differently. This, I think, is not a very compassionate or understanding way to proceed. Yes, we will always be able to sympathise most with forms of life we can see as most like us but we should never turn this into a prejudice. Life is not constrained to be like us and there is no reason to think that sentience or even consciousness must, a priori, exist only in things like us. It should not at all be surprising if it turns out plants have sentience or consciousness too. After all, human beings have even speculated on machine consciousness. Next to that, plants being more than green things which just grow should not be so controversial.

But for some vegans, at least, it is controversial for they have planted their vegan flag on the notion that meat-eating is cruel and that meat eaters are "violent murderers". Deciding that killing something sentient for food is horrific is all well and good but what happens when it turns out your carrot or potato or rice was once sentient too? Are such vegans now going to include themselves in the "violent murderer" category? Are they going to refuse to eat plants too and so commit suicide because they now refuse to eat at all? If my brief and pungent interactions with vegans are any measure [and they probably aren't] then the answer is "no". They are, like Neo in *The Matrix*, going to try and dodge the plant sentience bullet or make excuses for themselves. Yet such people kill and eat things that were once alive every bit as much as any meat eater does. Even they do not deny plants were once alive so harvesting and eating them must be akin to killing them. Seeing plants in the light of the developing science of how plants exist [as sentient, social organisms] only makes things worse for exactly those vegans who have decided that to eat a sentient thing is a moral crime of the worst kind. For now they are doing exactly the same thing. No doubt some such people will complain that an apple is not the same as a pig and, superficially, it may not appear to be. But convenient superficiality is no way to proceed here. We should be dealing in reality rather than in that which is rhetorically convenient. If plants are sentient or conscious, if they feel stress or pain, if they react to attackers as it has been suggested in peer-reviewed scientific literature that they do, then everyone, even the vegans, need to acknowledge this.

As I have already suggested, I do not find any of the emerging science about plants very surprising. If things are alive that surely makes a difference compared to if they are dead. [Here, in this argument at least, I set aside the notion that alive/dead is entirely a human distinction that the universe itself does not make. There are ways to look at life and death which don't make the distinctions it is customary for us to.] We would all of us say that alive things do not act or operate

or have the same functionality as dead things and so we would also all of us see alive things as in some sense different to dead things. Animate objects are not the same as inanimate objects. But we must always be careful about these distinctions for they are always contextual distinctions rather than absolute distinctions. They are also not always distinctions we consistently adhere to. Has a vegan ever killed a fly, a wasp or a spider, I wonder? I've never personally known a vegan but I would find it hard to believe they had not. Perhaps some vegans have even killed lots of such insects. Do vegans use pesticides, I wonder? Oh, and by the way, who decided that the things pesticides kill are "pests" exactly? From what mentality is such a designation coming? Very quickly, thinking in such ways, we come to realise that even vegans must surely be culpable for many deaths. Do insect deaths count less? Is there some table of vegan virtue to which I can refer which tells me which deaths are a death too far and which deaths are acceptable collateral damage? Death, it may be observed, is a staple of life. It is a natural occurrence. And, what's more, it is no less the case that one animal may kill another, either deliberately or as a consequence of some other action. It seems to me, then, that if we value life we must value all life. I would find it very hard to start picking and choosing between which lives have more value and which lives have less. Life, in a statement I hope no one will dispute, is actually one big continuum anyway. Life depends on life for it all survives together in symbiosis. Even where it depends on one life taking another life.

In my discussions with vegans, however, it has been suggested to me that comparing human life with other life is an error. Human beings, I'm told, are moral and all these other forms of life are not. They are just performing various virtually autonomic functions. They don't know any better, in effect. So if I were to compare a lion killing an antelope with a human killing a pig I might be mocked, as I have been, because to such people this is a stupid comparison. But is it? The lion's ways seem just as unquestioned to it as any human being's. Might we imagine that all lions are the same? Might not some have different habits or tastes to others? Is a hunger pang in one species not the same as a hunger pang in another? All life needs to feed on a source of energy to survive. In one way of viewing the entire universe all it is is the motion and transformation of forms of energy anyway. From this viewpoint, human distinctions are as nothing. All is just energy transference and transformation. That is all we and the lion are: energy. That is all the antelope and the pig are: energy. But the vegans will insist that, actually, our invented morals are the important thing here. I find this somewhat exceptionalist, as if the moral centre of the universe resided precisely somewhere in the human psyche. Why, uniquely in the universe, is it somehow the case that we humans have been blessed [and uniquely so!] with such moral clarity of insight? Does this make any sense at all in a randomly evolving universe? It doesn't and as even our human science expands it increasingly finds ways in which other animals [we humans are an animal too please don't forget!] have things we might describe as morals or ethics. Such things are essentially behaviours and behaviours which would [perhaps] tend to lead to benevolent outcomes. But, in saying that, have you ever noticed how no two people ever seem to have exactly the same moral code? Morality, it seems, gives wide scope for what billions of people will find acceptable or unacceptable. And that is before we ask what the morals of other animals and plants might be.

I interacted with morality, and things to do with morality such as interpretation, a great deal in the second of the now four books in my *There is Nothing to Stick to* quadrilogy. That book was called *The Fiction of Morality* for it is my belief that morality, like any human narrative, is itself a fiction. It is human produced and, at its best, is the articulation of good reasons for certain

behaviours and further good reasons against other, ill thought of behaviours. That is really all it is as may be seen when nature and the universe themselves allow untold horrors without passing a single comment. Death, murder, the preying of the stronger on the weaker, these are all means by which life, considered generally, progresses. If we ask, in general terms, if it is wrong for one creature to kill another and eat it then I do not remotely see how it can be as, if this is so, nature itself is “wrong” and “immoral” whole and entire. Nature proceeds as a general principle by consuming itself. That which is alive eats other things which are alive in innumerable ways. Even plants eat meat as in the case of the Venus fly trap, a plant which innocently minds its business until a juicy insect lands in its jaws, at which point it clamps them shut and slowly digests its live meal. Imagine the suffering! The only moral this plant has is its own survival. Certainly this form of life has no concern for any other that may perch in its jaws. If nature had a morality it would have to include accounting for this. But, of course, nature does not have a morality for it is the amorality of the universe which has given birth to the moral impulses in human beings. Yet can we now say that human beings are the moral measure? That you have a faculty says nothing about its use nor that it mandates that its use is binding. In short, if you feel something is a moral action that does not bind anyone else to agree with you. The state and scope of morals and morality are, to say the least, matters of debate. And what is the penalty for being immoral or amoral anyway? It may be the case that, in some cases, human beings take action against you but this only reveals that human behaviour, generally considered, is nothing other than a game of actions and consequences. Actions, or inactions, have consequences, and consequences that we may not always see, and there is not much more to be said about it, moralistic narratives notwithstanding. That someone or some group has a moral does not mean anything other than that they do. It is not clear it does, or should, mean anything for anyone else. What is more, the universe’s apparent amorality, that which birthed our own apparent moralities, stands there, inert, as the ultimate context and condition of those very same moralities. We humans can always say something is right or wrong but we can never say so in an absolute way, or, rather, we can ONLY say so in a very conditioned and inabsolute way. We can only protest and give reasons for things. We can never make the universe so. For it, and how it operates, is forever beyond our control. It is the context for us. We are not the context for it. I personally find this to be a very powerful influence on what I may refer to as morals or virtue for how can you ignore that which stands as the context for everything, that which is everything in its manner of operation? I think you do so at your peril. I think this stands as a marker of authentic reality. I think that human exceptionalism and anthropomorphism, the deciding that human beings are the measure, is more often than not a crass act of narcissism and egocentrism, an unjustifiable speciesism and an act of self-regarding.

Yet none of this means that I want animals to suffer. None of this means I look on with a smile as animals are mistreated. In general terms, I would wish that all living things interact with each other with peace, compassion and respect. This may certainly mean that some human practices should be altered or even stopped. I am the last person to tell you that everything we do should carry on as it is. There are undoubtedly consequences of much human behaviour which impact other forms of life in negative and exploitative ways. Yet I am not sure, from my researches, that life is actually always so peaceful, compassionate and respectful. These, after all, are only HUMAN values and life is not always, as so many unrealistic humans seem to want it to be, so fluffy and cuddly. It is still the case that life rolls on by preying on other life. It is not clear that it could do any other. Whether you are eating living plants or animals which are made of living

plants you are still life consuming other life. Even within our own beings life exists, in the form of bacteria and microbes, which are not “us”. Life is parasitic on life whole and entire. Microscopic bed bugs in your bedding eat your dead skin even while some other insects, in some tropical part of the world, are born inside a living creature from which they proceed to eat their way out, life preying on life. This is natural and normal, the regular, everyday existence of life which seems to operate only on the principle “if it can happen then it will happen”. This is how life proceeds. Realism should recognise this much more than it should moralise it. It seems to me that if we want to pronounce on life it would assist us greatly if we spent some time considering how life actually exists and how it proceeds before we decide that our self-important and sometimes masturbatory pronouncements are actually the last word on the issue. Calling people “violent murderers” is all well and good but if such moralists opened their eyes a little more they might then realise that such “murder” probably happens tens of millions of times a day in ways quite natural and unreflective. We live in a murderous world where murder is one of the most natural things in it. That murder is, in fact, survival which might be the only actual “moral” that is universal throughout life in the universe.

I see this position as one which takes the reality of the universe and the natural world into account. I do not believe that human morality has some special insight into the nature of things which other life is not privy to and so which we are inevitably mandated to defer to. I do not believe that the argument “but pain and suffering” trumps all other arguments. Such notables as Nietzsche argued that life itself is suffering and whilst this is not then an argument for causing suffering it is, perhaps, a realisation that in life it is unavoidable. To be sentient is not to be borne on fluffy clouds and soft cushions throughout one’s existence. It is, in fact, to be subject to damage, decay and even attack from its very inception. We might, in fact, do well to stop and ask ourselves where things come from and to what they return before we insist on the inviolability and integrity of the identities that we accord to things, things which, in each case, exist for microscopic amounts of time in the grand scheme of things.

It seems to me that when human beings get too moralistic they do become rather precious. Can we really say that individual examples of anything are really that important? Am I, a human being, of universe-changing significance? I would find it hard to believe so. I find it more realistic, and less egoistic, to think that random chance caused me to be and inevitable decay will cause me to disappear again. In that, I would have lasted for not even a veritable eye blink of time, an event that nothing took note of and which has no special reason to be remembered. It is not the case, I think, that every breath, feeling and emotion matters, regardless of how difficult I or other people might find that to accept. We have got so used to telling ourselves how important everything is that it is now difficult for it to dawn on us that, actually, none of this really matters at all. This planet some of us find so important is just one of billions and, newsflash, it was never intended that it last forever anyway. Destruction was on the menu of everything from minute one of day one. And no one’s feelings were [or should be] taken into account.

Nevertheless I would myself also urge compassion for, as my spiritual and philosophical resources in the *There is Nothing to Stick to* project agree, the “uncaring” nature of the natural world is actually the very thing which provides for the life and existence of all things. This can, as some do, be seen as a benevolence and a compassion. Live and let live, all things considered, is not the worst motto one could live by. That we go through life causing as little harm as possible is a good attitude to take in my view. It will also be seen, if one considers this issue more widely in the concept of my other “anarchist” views, that the world as I imagine it would make much

of the apparatus of a machinery that treats animals as raw materials for human existence much more difficult to maintain. This, in fact, is where my worldview and the worldview of those who consider themselves vegans would coalesce. I imagine a less civilised, less centralised, more natural world. In the language of George Monbiot this would be a world of “rewilding”. This, in many respects, would be a more agrarian and less technological world. In such a world it would seem to me that people took more care of and responsibility for themselves and relied less on corporations and economic enterprises to do so. In other words, I see “civilisation” as the problem and it is civilisation which, in most cases, amplifies any problems, such as industrial scale meat eating, which already exist. True, people ate meat before civilisation but it is civilisation and its centralising organisation which turns sentient beings into factory goods. Animals, I agree, are not and should not be regarded as factory goods. Yet that is a value I hold rather than a dictate of the universe.

In the end, however, we can only see as we see. Eating meat is not a crime and neither is it immoral. I can only assert that and I can never make it so. Morals and beliefs are only ever rhetorical and it doesn’t matter where they come from. Yet even believing that we can still have an eye to the wider context of human practices on earth. It is clear that farming animals carries huge consequences when done to industrial levels. Human beings may want to consider that if they do not want to suffer from the consequences, foreseen or unforeseen. For actions always have consequences and life is a matter of surviving them. Or not. Yet it is also the case that human narratives about things are fictions, hence the short verse at the head of this piece on veganism which came from Zen and Daoist sources. We are told in it that life is not life and death is not death, at least not as we conceive of them. I believe this is so for life and death are merely two more invented human fictions, states seen from one human point of view. Things, so we are then told, are not as they appear, a statement which warns us that all human ways of seeing are only human ways of seeing. But, we are then reminded, neither are they otherwise. Replacing a fiction with another fiction does not make things any better. We have only swapped one illusory imposition for another. What we must do, in a piece of Daoist wisdom, is cease to cherish our opinions. This, ironically, is the very thing that most human beings, myself included, struggle to do. And so they get caught up in the net of their beliefs, desires, wants and narratives about the world which things like Daoism, Zen and Greek Cynicism tell us is the real problem. We want to fix the world when, actually, it should be the world that is fixing us.

But do we have ears to hear that or will we egotistically continue to plough on regardless as if we could create some equation that balanced everything out better than the actionless action of existence does all by itself without goal, or end, or purpose?

Only cease to cherish your own opinions.

Anarchist Liturgy III: For Daily Recital

It is said that in olden times those who ruled everything under Heaven wanted nothing and the world was fulfilled; they practised non-action and the whole of life was transformed; they were immensely deep in their stillness and the many families of the world were calm.

The action of non-action is called Heaven.

The words of non-action are called Virtue.

To love all humanity and to bring success to them is called benevolence.

To unite what is not united is called greatness.

To go beyond barriers and boundaries is called open-handedness.

To have a vast multitude of diverse things is called wealth.

To have and to hold Virtue is called guidance.

To grow in maturity in Virtue is called stability.

To be aligned with the Way is called completion.

To refuse to allow anything external which distracts you is called perfection.

The one who clearly perceives these 10 things will also be magnanimous in their ventures and their actions will benefit all life.

At the great Origin there was nothing, nothing, no name.

The Whole arose from it; there was One without form.

In taking different forms, it brought life and became known as Virtue.

Before any shape was given their roles were assigned, various and diverse but all linked to one another.

This was their lot.

The forces worked on and things were created, they grew and took distinct shapes, and these were called 'bodies'.

The bodies contained spirits, each distinct and mortal.

This is what we call the innate nature.

Train this innate nature and it will return to Virtue; Virtue at its best is identical with the Origin.

Being of the One is to be ultimately formless and this formlessness is vast.

This is like the opening and shutting of a bird's beak, where the opening and shutting is like Heaven and Earth united.

This unity is chaotic and disorderly; it looks stupid or foolish.

This is known as Mysterious Virtue, being, without knowing it, part of the great Submission.

Let me tell you about the way:

There is a way that leads to vision,

A way that confuses confusion.

At the end of this way there is no sorrow,
This way leads away from the world,
But it is you who must make the effort to walk this way
Because you must follow the way to become free.

And this is that way:
Everything is transient,
Everything is sorrow,
Everything is unreal:
This is the way.

Therefore:

Don't remember, don't project, don't think.
Don't analyse, don't control, let go.
No past, no future, no now.
No solution, no intention, no attachment.
This is the way.

Congratulations to the person who has toiled and has found life!
Follow the way of water and not a way of your own!

If you want the way to appear,
Be neither for nor against.
For and against opposing each other —
This is the mind's disease.

Without recognising the mysterious principle
It is useless to practice quietude.
Do not seek the real;
Just extinguish your views.

Living and dying while forgetting desire — This is original nature.

Life is not life
And death is not death.
The way makes no such distinctions.
Things are not as they appear;
Yet neither are they otherwise.
So you should only cease to cherish your opinions.

In the pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired.
In the pursuit of Dao, every day something is dropped.
Less and less is done
Until actionless action is achieved.
When nothing is done, nothing is left undone.
The world is ruled by letting things take their course.
It cannot be ruled by interfering.

Practice non-action.
Work without doing.
There is nothing to stick to.
Be passersby.

All composite things are impermanent,
They are subject to birth and death;
Put an end to birth and death,
And there is a blissful tranquillity.

The Wanderer's Shadow

1. Abolish all teachers! Abolish all teachings! From now on let everyone be self-taught and let the only teaching be "Know thyself! Teach thyself! This is all that is to be known and experienced!"
2. Why is the world in turmoil? The premise is itself illustrative of the premises required to imagine that it could be so. Is there some ideal for which we are, collectively, as a species, supposed to be striving? How unnatural is such an idea! Lesson one! All goals are invented, all intentions manufactured! To know yourself is to experience yourself. It is not to know [i.e. to invent] facts about yourself or to create goals! The shadow follows the wanderer. It does not decide to do so!
3. "The world" as a common, human space, a place of shared beliefs, values and intentions, is a fiction!
4. Henceforth it will be the duty of every human being to be authentically themselves.
5. The shadow hides the ground and it is we who cast it. Remove the shadow, see the ground. How do you remove the shadow?
6. The other is a shadow and we call it a monster. But "other" is only a fiction, a point of view. The other is us. One and the same.
7. The other is already always there for everything is the context for anything. No one wanders alone. There is no alone. Each casts their shadow.
8. Your thoughts about the thing are not the thing; your attitude to the situation is not the situation. Scatter this life's aims and objects to the wind.
9. Reality does not have a language; the Way does not have a preferred expression or canonical description. Everything is as it becomes.
10. No thing lasts forever; Nothing lasts forever. The ultimate truth is change. The nature of Being is movement.
11. Can you act without being concerned about loss and gain? Can you act knowing that nothing abides? The greatest battle is with oneself.
12. Things are not happening "to you". Things are just happening. They will cease and then other things will happen. To make your way remain unknown; erase all shadows.
13. The hardest thing to grasp is to stop grasping. How can you grasp a shadow or capture a reflection? It is best to live in simplicity and humility. The wise do not seek fame or notoriety. Therefore, cast no shadow. Mirror facing mirror, nowhere else.

The Mirror and the Seashore

Thoughts. Mind. Thinking. No-thoughts. No-mind. No-thinking.

Within Zen Buddhist and Daoist thought worlds there are two metaphors: these are those of the mirror and the seashore. They serve similar purposes: to promote ideas of non-attachment to thoughts and the refusal to be bound by any thoughts, ideas or narratives at all. This is not a vision of the mind which is about the attainment or collection of things and so the agglomeration of something denominated 'knowledge'. Indeed, it is one which privileges the refusal to hold anything at all within something we might call our mind. The mirror, for example, is a reflecting surface. It does not hold what it captures. It simply reflects it back. In a similar way, the seashore is caressed by the sea which may, from time to time, deposit items upon it. But the seashore, in this case, is indifferent and unconcerned about this and is happy to let that which is left upon it stay indefinitely or be just as easily swept away again. The metaphors of mirror and seashore encourage non-attachment, being dispassionate and acting without action.

In his book *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, towards the end, Friedrich Nietzsche has the following aphorism:

“Life as the yield of life. — No matter how far a man may extend himself with his knowledge, no matter how objectively he may come to view himself, in the end it can yield to him nothing but his own biography.”

I see in this thought a mentality compatible with that of the Zen Buddhists and Daoists above. For what is it to imagine that a path of life yields nothing but the tracings of where it has been, a biography? Is it not to look disapprovingly on the notion that one may have collected up things egotistically regarded as 'knowledge' or 'truths' and to count them all as vanity? In this aphorism Nietzsche is agreeing with the past, present and future versions of himself that human beings are prey to many powerful illusions and that they should regard them all as exactly that and treat them accordingly. Here it is noteworthy that Nietzsche, in general, did not so much think of thoughts in terms of true or false but in terms of therapeutic valuations: he wanted to know if such things promoted health or disease in the human being and in human culture generally. Already when Nietzsche had written this aphorism in the late 1870s he had written of the human being as that creature which is a matter of will and desire where, for such a being, it doesn't matter much what illusion they become attached to so long as it gives them a feeling of power and of control.

Yet it is just such power and control that, it seems to me, the Zen Buddhists and the Daoists are looking to give up. They think these things to be some of the “illusions that we have forgotten are illusions” which is what Nietzsche calls those things we denominate truth in an essay he wrote earlier in the 1870s. Daoists, for example, speak of and value the idea of 'wu wei' a great deal. 'Wu wei' is best translated into English as 'actionless action' rather than the often common 'non-action' since, so I am led to understand, it is not a concept which means doing nothing. Instead,

the Daoist practitioner is imagined as an active participant in the things of life — yet not as someone with micromanaged intentions. This is seen as a matter of genuineness or authenticity in a conception of the whole that is the existence of all things in which ‘emptiness’ is seen as the source of all possibility. From such a point of view desires, will, intentions, attachments, are all barriers to possibility and enemies of becoming because they impose upon people mental structures which limit their abilities to see, to imagine, to participate and to dream. In effect, the Daoist asks why we should put up mental walls or restrict ourselves by means of entirely thought-based schemes when nothing about our universe of experience itself imposes such things or presents them as inherent to life itself. The situation, whatever the situation is, is not limited to the things we immediately, or even reflectively, think about it. There is no equation of thought and reality. This is, in turn, to concede, as the theologian and philosopher Jack Caputo does, that there is nothing we think that is not an interpretation.

But if there is nothing we think that is not an interpretation then this surely also means that there is nothing that we think that is not partial — in at least two senses. First, an interpretation is our’s, and not someone else’s, and, second, because of the first reason it is also much, much less than the whole, the whole which would be all the possible interpretations. Realising this, we now see, once again, how becoming attached to things or desiring things is actually a restriction of possibility. In fact, it is the imposition of a fiction simply because we become attached to it, either because we want to be through desire or will or because we are not sufficiently detached from it to see it as simply an interpretation. It would be like trying to become like a mirror that wants to possess the image it reflects or like a seashore which wants to retain the items the sea spits out onto it. Yet such a seashore, if it did this in reality, would soon become cluttered. Over time, it would cease to be the empty expanse next to the sea upon which things might occasionally be washed and would, instead, become a dumping ground, a tip, a public dustbin. The seashore as dustbin mind would actually impair its own ability to be that which it is. In Nietzsche’s terms, we would then be able to diagnose the habits of attachment, will, intention and desire as unhealthy and disease-inducing habits. So, actually, refusing to hold onto things, taking a detached attitude to the action of the sea of life as it sweeps across our minds, turns out to be good for the seashore, the seashore that is mind. The thoughts may come and the thoughts may go, the actions of a mind that is thinking, but we do not need to accept them or be under their tyranny. We are not forced to hold onto them or take them seriously anymore.

There is another saying that comes from these Eastern philosophies and it is the following: “the no-mind thinks no-thoughts about no-things”. It seems, to me at least, to be a riddle and yet I imagine that in this brief essay I might have had some thoughts which illuminate its meaning. Zen Buddhists and Daoists know well that we have minds and we think thoughts. The Buddha himself, in fact, is said to have said that “we are what we think”. (He also said ‘there is nothing to stick to’ which is relevant but a whole other story!) This, indeed, is why I imagine such philosophies are so concerned with the activity of the mind in the first place. But, that being the case, it suggests that mental hygiene and psychological health are of primary importance for these most therapeutic of spiritualities in which peace and enlightenment are the highest personal goods and the most valuable possessions. This saying, I think, encapsulates the lack of attachment and refusal of imposed narratives that I have already spoken about. It encourages actionless action and loss of intention and a ‘letting things be’ that is hard for people used to ‘gaining knowledge’ or ‘understanding things’ or ‘making things so’ to accept. They only ever do these things to use them in accordance with their own intentions and desires and attachments in the pursuance of

some imagined necessity they call “making sense”. This “making sense” is when things are as they require them to be. Rarely, however, do they question the narrative, and the values, which have motivated them to imagine that this was the purpose of thinking or the mind in the first place. We have here, then, in the thoughts and ideas presented in this short essay, a completely different way to see the world. But you should not then think that this Eastern way is ‘the right way’ where the other, more Western, one was not... for then you will only have fallen into the same trap all over again.

And that trap is ... ?

An Anarchist Handbook Cannot Be Written

There comes a point in writing a book of any length, certainly in my experience, at which you begin to wonder if what you have started you will be able to finish. The idea that you began with back when you were fresh-faced and enthusiastic, an idea that seemed simple yet brilliant, worthwhile and even necessary, now seems rather more difficult to realise and perhaps not so necessary as it once was. This is to say that a book is a process and sometimes in that process you begin to doubt its a process worth going through.

When that book is about anarchy and anarchism, however, as this one is, those doubts have perhaps more grounds to be heeded. And so it was that in the last few days, desperately struggling to justify this book to myself any longer, I began to think that there shouldn't be anything such as "an anarchist handbook" anyway. I had, I thought to myself, fallen into the trap, as humans always do, of imagining there is some code, algorithm, order, set of beliefs or truths, canon, or list of propositions which finally and eternally put everything in its place, set the world to rights and solve everything. The philosopher Richard Rorty once talked of this in terms of philosophers afflicted with this malady [of which there are many] as trying "to escape time and chance". But you can't escape time and chance. Time and chance is what made you and they are who you are. "Once and for all" is not a statement that really applies to anything that exists. In the final analysis, it doesn't even apply to existence itself or its physical manifestation, the universe.

In writing this book, I had been trying to bring together a collection of things I had found very important in writing the previous volumes of *There is Nothing to Stick to* – and I don't think that this was a bad motive. Yet I wanted to do that here in distilled or concentrated form, as much for myself as for any potential others, so that there was a handy [= handbook], bite-size and not too long and rambling version of the prior books in the project that did not require one to wade through philosophical arguments which may have put many off before they even started. I do not think that this was a bad motivation either. But it does have some problems.

One is that, in effect, I was trying to create some anarchist canon of references and this is definitively misguided. We all have sayings, descriptions, phraseology that we like. But, in the end, its all just words and, as I have said myself, being influenced by the very same ideas that I hoped to pass on and represent here, words are not enough. Words are linguistic tools which help us to do things. But they do this in fictive ways. You cannot hold reality in words and the very first chapter of the Tao Te Ching, for example, makes this very clear when it says that "the way that can be named is not the eternal way". In short, if you can talk about it you can be sure you've fictionalised it. That is something an anarchist, or anybody else, actually, should be very wary of doing because it is reality we want to open ourselves up to not fictions of our own creation. So even though there may be texts, thoughts and ideas which are very powerful, suggestive and influential for us, we need to remember what they are. This will contextualise them and help us to realise that existence is silence, it does not speak. Reality stands mute and offers no opinion. And that's one very good reason why there couldn't be an anarchist handbook.

A second reason is related. Just because I think that various Daoist, Cynic, Zen, Nietzschean, anarchist, spiritual, philosophical or any other kind of texts are useful it does not mean that anyone else should, let alone that they actually might. We might say that these references are indicators of my own journey to where I think I am today. But there is no necessary reason why they have to mean anything to anybody else. Of course, they may do and some things that become popular amongst larger groups of people are so because they speak to the experiences of larger groups of people. That doesn't make them better or more necessary though either because there is no standard to measure against. We are all on our own incommensurate and unmeasurable journeys and whilst one idea might hold water for one person, it might not for another. And that's OK. That's precisely what anarchy and anarchism should be.

A third reason is slightly different and its to do with education. Recently I saw education discussed by a political activist of colour. His concern was that history in terms of the culturally dominant form of education, that most often taught in state schools, only deals with very selective events, uniformly in ways in which the state comes out of it smelling of roses, and never even once addresses state failures or, worse, crimes. History, as taught in this way, then, is very one-sided. In a former colonial power, for example, you hear nothing about the cruelty, violence and brutality which creates colonies and forms empires. Rather, you hear instead about the imagined benefits for the people back home or how the world was "civilised" by the colonialisng force if, indeed, it is mentioned at all. What is overlooked, then, is that things are the way they are because certain things happened to make them that way, that there were winners and losers, and that good and bad happened.

My response to this at the time was mostly to concede the activist's point. But not totally. Sure, if you leave your education to what your schools teach you, receiving the culturally dominant narrative only in the process, then you will be highly likely to get a very partial [in two senses] and one-sided view of things. The simple fact that so much has been omitted will be as bad as the fact that it may have been ideologically formulated or presented as well. Perhaps the simplest way education shapes people is by omitting options, alternatives or other points of view. Education can very easily become something which aims to teach you one narrative and if you are any kind of minority its almost certainly not one in your favour. The reason, however, that I did not entirely concede the point is that, although all of this is certainly right, state education is not the only kind of education available. I would argue its not even the primary means of education available. And what is that? Its SELF-EDUCATION. There is a strong strand of educating yourself, becoming enlightened, knowing yourself and so generally disabusing yourself of various cultural narratives right through all the sources that I have used in my writings about anarchy and anarchism. Anarchists or anti-civilizationists, simply put, don't leave it to others to tell them what's what. They are people highly motivated to educate themselves, to come to their own conclusions and follow their own paths. They are self-actualised individuals. You can see this in Laozi and Zhuangzi, in Jesus [Christ] and Nietzsche [Antichrist!], in John Cage and Emma Goldman, in Diogenes, Richard Rorty and Ludwig Wittgenstein, all sources I mined for clues as to my anarchist direction in the first two parts of *There is Nothing to Stick to*. In the third volume of the series I added in the writer and magician Alan Moore, the Cynics generally considered, those behind the Gospel of Thomas, which talks about personally identified knowledge based in individual interpretation leading to its own version of salvation, and the literary example of the anarchist banker from Fernando Pessoa, hardly examples of people any less self-actualised. Its true that not all of these people are adequately or appropriately described as "anarchists or

anti-civilizationists,” of course, but what is true is that all of them demur in regard to a culturally dominant tradition and go their own way. This way, I submit, is an anarchist, anti-civilisationist way and its one I would personally want every human being to take up. This is because it is my intuition, as well as the result of my reading and learning, that people are responsible for themselves — as well as being most responsible when they take on such a responsibility.

But if there’s no canon, if there never could be, if nothing one person thinks or believes is necessarily relevant to anyone else [or if all thoughts and beliefs are equally illusory], and if people at their best are self-actualised beings who take responsibility for the course of their own lives [and maybe for others’ too], then where does this leave us in regard to an anarchist handbook? It leaves us better off without one! It leaves us better off without one because, should we in fact have one, we will tend to fetishize it, canonize it, become bewitched by its words which will inevitably become interpreted in fixed, static ways, until merely saying the words of the book will become regarded as a significant, ritualistic action. This is what happens with many religious or political texts, words and phrases when controlled by various types of readers. Yet the anarchy and anarchism I have tried to speak to in *There is Nothing to Stick to*, although I have used hundreds of thousands of words to create it, is, paradoxically, not about words at all. It is about silence and perhaps, at most, words and silence together. If you have read any of these writings, more so if you’ve read most of them, you will see that I do not speak to an anarchism of knowledge or an anarchy in which “understanding” plays much part. Frankly, it is honestly considered that these are illusions, dreams, fictions. They play a role, where they exist, rather than having an actuality. Buddhists speak of “enlightenment” and there is a very real sense in which this enlightenment is an extinguishing of knowledge and understanding as it is normally conceived in a way which creates canonical narratives [so “nirvana”]. Buddhism had credulity for linguistic creations millennia before postmodernism appeared. Buddhism, indeed, sees the danger in words even as Nietzsche did in his essay of 1873 which I love so much, his essay in which truths, which are made of words, are “illusions of which we have forgotten they are illusions.” Nietzsche was never more Buddhist than when he wrote this and it is worth reading section 53 of my *Spiritual and Political Anarchy* [*There is Nothing to Stick to* 3] for a Zen meditation on not “falling into the trap of words”. For words are a trap and we humans most usually proceed by falling headlong into it.

None of this is very good from the point of view of the person wanting to create a “handbook” — and particularly not a handbook about the kind of anarchy that I want to talk about. I can talk about principles, on the one hand, [as I have above in regard to gender and sexuality as one example] but they aren’t principles so much as beliefs I have come to hold and can find reasons for. But so what? That’s what humans do and people have enunciated any number of hateful and disreputable principles throughout human history by exactly the same method. Believing something or having a principle or a set of reasons for something is, in this sense, simply a rhetorical game. On the other hand, I can quote phrases such as “When nothing is done, nothing is left undone” and this is surely a fine anarchist sentiment, one entirely in line with the spiritual forbears I have adopted in Daoism and Zen. But why is this? Its because it is judged to be an expression of an idea in line with other ideas I already hold, part of the same rhetorical game.

It is at this point that I have to point out that the anarchy I speak to is not about denying that human beings have thoughts, can think, and are intellectual beings. It is not wilful stupidity or ignorance. Human beings do have thoughts, they do think and they do have intellects. It is not a matter of denying this but it is a matter of contextualising it. We need to contextualise these

things because our thoughts and the workings of our intellects are ours alone. We can say that in individual and collective senses. Would it matter if all human beings everywhere came to the same conclusion about something? No. Human beings are not the measure of anything and their purposes [which always guide their thoughts and intellectual processes] are not the purposes of anything else [as an environmental discussion would very quickly show!] and neither are they good, right or true purposes or the purposes of the universe. Indeed, there's no reason to think such purposes are remotely important except to humans themselves and even that might be a grand act of self-deception for how can human beings know if what they are doing is good, right or true except by their own artificial, rhetorical processes and measurements? The spiritual and philosophical anarchism I have spoken to regards this as the creation of self-justificatory narratives responding to a felt intellectual need to have reasons for things. This, in turn, tickles that drive, which could be conceived very much like genitalia which require sexual stimulation, which requires meaning. We need meaning orgasms and meaning arousal! But the error here is in imagining the reasons we come up with [to stimulate ourselves] map or even are reality when all they are is ideas, concepts, linguistic formulations, our responding to a need we have. They may be felt of use in human activity but any use they have is merely felt and beyond that we cannot say. It is, I believe, about always contextualising human intellectuality with the lack of intellectuality from which it came and to which it is returning. Anarchy's order is chaos and not human narratives. Our place in this is surely of intellectual interest but intellectual interest itself is a feedback loop of responding to who and what we are, to life. It doesn't make what [or how] we think "reality".

And, indeed, why would we think that what we thought was reality just because we thought that what we thought matched up to such a thing? Why would we think there was a reality in the first place against which to measure things? Reality is itself a fiction whenever we want to set it up as a measure corresponding to our desire to measure things against something. It involves setting things in place and making them stand fast and that, I propose after many others I've quoted at length, is a peculiar need or desire we have developed rather than a necessity in itself. We are only making our meaning genitalia tingle for the feeling it gives us and colluding in our own willing self-deception because it feels good. Yet the minute we stand back from this [rhetorically speaking!] we find that this all falls apart, is only something about human beings and has no more authority or convincingness than would be needed by a species wanting to exist in a certain way. But what does it matter what way we do exist or why? Can a species criticise itself? Did a species decide one day how its form of life would be constructed and carried out, what drives it would have and what felt needs it would seek to satisfy, both consciously and unconsciously? Of course not.

The human being is a particular thing – but it is a particular thing in a universe of particular things, a universe of particular things which, in another sense, are all the same thing, be that matter or energy in their diversity. But now we are coming back to human talk again and so human ideas, conceptions, narratives, understandings. This is not what things are. It is how they are imagined and discussed. What things are can only be falsified with words and itself requires no words. Yet how would we know what to say about anything anyway?

Right and wrong,
Wrong and right.
Without the illusion of a fiction

How would we know who we were or that we were?

This is the wisdom in which “an anarchist handbook” is a grand mistake, a self-deception, a confusion. You cannot lay down any “anarchist precepts” or distil “the essential anarchism”. How to do and to be is not contained in words. You can, however, do that if you think that humans are the measure, their desires are important and that there is a “right way”. You can if you think human anarchism creates anarchy. But I don’t think that because I am contextualised by everything else that exists and doesn’t exist together in one great whole. I am a tiny part of it and it consumes me, birthed me and destroys me in the process of remaking me, snuffing out the identity I presumed to give it and whatever other bits of it I presumed to imagine. If that is what I am, a void unto myself, then it is not a matter of words and handbooks but of the simple participation of letting go of words and handbooks.

Life is a label.

Death is a label.

But what is a label?

A fiction.

So is there life and death?

The fiction of “is” persists, but there is no “is” — only that linguistic riddle which bewitches us because it is the means to meaning, the itch that must be scratched. This is that bad habit which is meaning as stasis, a habit we must get out of if we would imitate existence in its changing, moving manner of operation. What, then, is meaning in the end except a void, a nothing which is the ever present possibility for something? “Wander where there is no path,” counsels the book of Zhuangzi, and in this the wisdom is given that its all about practice and nothing not study and something . What’s more, study is not practice even as something is not nothing. “Expect nothing, seek nothing, and grasp nothing,” said the Soto Zen master, Dogen, recalling to mind the examples of the mirror and the seashore, those symbols of non-attachment, of empty activity as things go about their business. But it is to the opening chapter of the Tao Te Ching that we finally return to illustrate this point when it states:

“Free from desire you see the mystery.

Full of desire you see the manifestations.”

Anarchy as mystery! Without desire, which must always be desire for something, desire for things and so for all the philosophical baggage of things, this is what anarchy is, a spiritual and philosophical entity rather than a political achievement. This linguistic formulation of Laozi’s is all about letting go of something and embracing nothing, of the different “sight” that accrues when one does this. It is not that one is there and one is not — or that one is right and one is wrong — but that how one is affects what you can do and be . It is about practice and not study. It is about an existence rather than a body of knowledge.

An anarchism of anarchy is an existence and a practice. It is a life and how you live. Its not a handbook. A handbook is just more

Perceptions,

Fictions,

Illusions,
Imaginary states.

Tao Te Ching and Nothing to Stick To

There is nothing to stick to...

The way that can be spoken of is not the constant way; The name that can be named is not the constant name. The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth; The named was the mother of the myriad creatures. Hence, always rid yourself of desires in order to observe its secrets; But always allow yourself to have desires in order to observe its manifestations. These two are the same but diverge in name as they issue forth. Being the same, they are called mysteries. Mystery upon mystery, the gateway of the manifold secrets. (Tao Te Ching, 1)

Actionless actions and wordless words. There is nothing to stick to... The whole world recognises the beautiful as the beautiful, yet this is only the ugly; the whole world recognises the good as the good, yet this is only the bad. Thus, Something and Nothing produce each other; The difficult and easy compliment each other; Note and sound harmonise with each other. Therefore the sage keeps to the deed that consists in taking no action and practices the teaching that uses no words. The myriad creatures rise from it yet it claims no authority; It gives them life yet claims no possession; It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude; It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit. It is because it lays claim to no merit that its merit never deserts it. (Tao Te Ching, 2)

No knowledge, no desire, no intention: the way to peaceful order. There is nothing to stick to...

Not to honour people of worth will keep the people from contention; not to value goods which are hard to come by will keep them from theft; not to display what is desirable will keep them from being unsettled of mind. Therefore, in governing the people, the sage empties their minds but fills their bellies, weakens their wills but strengthens their bones. She always keeps them innocent of knowledge and free from desire, and ensures that the clever never dare to act. Do that which consists in taking no action, and order will prevail. (Tao Te Ching, 3)

The big picture... Who are we? Of what are we a part? No purpose, no concern, a void. There is nothing to stick to...

The Tao is like an empty bowl which in being used can never be filled up. Fathomless, it seems to be the origin of all things. It blunts all sharp edges. It unties all tangles. It harmonises all lights. It unites the world into one whole. Hidden in the deeps, yet it seems to exist forever. I do not know whose child it is; it seems to be the common ancestor of all, the father of all things. Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs; the sage is ruthless, and treats the people as straw dogs. Is not the space between heaven and earth like a bellows? It is empty without being exhausted: the more it works, the more comes out. Much speech leads inevitably to silence. Better to hold fast to the void. (Tao Te Ching, 4–5)

Reality is selfless. It favours no outcome over any other. In humility without desire or intention there is wisdom and we act as nature in its manner of operation. There is nothing to stick to...

Heaven lasts long, and Earth abides. What is the secret of their durability? Is it not because they do not live for themselves that they can live so long? Therefore, the sage wants to remain

behind but finds themselves at the head of others; reckons themselves out, but finds themselves safe and secure. Is it not because they are selfless that their Self is realised? (Tao Te Ching, 7)

Be like water. There is much wisdom in this metaphor. There is nothing to stick to...

The highest good is like that of water. The goodness of water is that it benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not contend with them, but is content with the places that all people disdain. It is this that makes water so near to the Way. And if people think the ground the best place for building a house upon, if among thoughts they value those that are profound, if in friendship they value gentleness, if in words, truth; in government, good order; in deeds, effectiveness; in actions, timeliness — in each case it is because they prefer what does not lead to strife, and therefore does not go amiss. (Tao Te Ching, 8)

The wisdom of Nothing. There is nothing to stick to...

Thirty spokes share one hub. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose at hand, and you will have the use of the cart. Knead clay in order to make a vessel. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose at hand, and you will have the use of the vessel. Cut out doors and windows in order to make a room. Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the room. Thus, what we gain is Something, yet it is by virtue of Nothing that this can be put to use. (Tao Te Ching, 11)

Something from nothing, the nameable from the unnameable. Things cannot be traced from their origin nor followed to their end. Where do you come from, why are you here? There is nothing to stick to...

Look at it but you cannot see it! Its name is formless. Listen to it but you cannot hear it! Its name is soundless. Grasp it but you cannot get it! Its name is incorporeal. These three attributes are unfathomable; therefore they fuse into one. Its upper side is not bright: its underside is not dim. Continually the Unnameable moves on, until it returns beyond the realm of things. We call it the formless, the imageless image. We call it the indefinable and unimaginable. Confront it and you do not see its face! Follow it and you do not see its back! Yet, equipped with this timeless Tao, you can harness present realities. To know the origins is initiation into the Tao. (Tao Te Ching, 14)

Emptiness, Peace, Stillness, Constancy... These are the things of true value, the things of nature in this manner of operation. These are destiny. There is nothing to stick to...

Attain to utmost emptiness . Cling single-heartedly to interior peace . While all things are stirring together, I only contemplate the Return. For flourishing as they do, each of them will return to its root. To return to the root is to find peace. To find peace is to fulfill one's destiny. To fulfill one's destiny is to be constant. To know the Constant is called insight. If one does not know the Constant, one runs blindly into disasters. If one knows the Constant, one can understand and embrace all. If one understands and embraces all, one is capable of doing justice. To be just is to be kingly; to be kingly is to be heavenly; to be heavenly is to be one with the Tao; to be one with the Tao is to abide forever. Such a one will be safe and whole even after the dissolution of their body. (Tao Te Ching, 16)

When the way of non-action is forgotten, when the metaphor of water fades away, when desire, intention and preference appears, then our contentious society is born. There is nothing to stick to...

When the great Tao is forgotten, kindness and mortality arise. When wisdom and intelligence are born, the great pretence begins. When there is no peace within the family, filial piety and

devotion arise. When the country is confused and in chaos, loyal ministers appear. (Tao Te Ching, 18)

Plainness, simplicity, lack of desire: the way to peace in accordance with nature. There is nothing to stick to...

Abandon sageliness and discard wisdom; then the people will benefit one hundredfold. Abandon humility and discard righteousness; then the people will return to filial piety and deep love. Abandon skill and discard profit; then there will be no thieves or robbers. However, these three things are ornament and not adequate. Therefore, let people hold onto these: manifest plainness, embrace simplicity, reduce selfishness, have few desires. (Tao Te Ching, 19)

A different way. There is nothing to stick to...

Give up learning, and put an end to your troubles. Is there a difference between yes and no? Is there a difference between good and evil? Must I fear what others fear? What nonsense! Other people are contented, enjoying the sacrificial feast of the ox. In spring, some go to the park and climb the terrace. But I alone am drifting, not knowing where I am. Like a newborn babe before it learns to smile, I am alone without a place to go. Others have more than they need, but I alone have nothing. I am a fool. Oh, yes, I am confused. Others are clear and bright, but I alone am dim and weak. Others are sharp and clever, but I alone am dull and stupid. Oh, I drift like the waves of the sea, without direction, like restless wind. Everyone else is busy, but I alone am aimless and depressed. I am different. I am nourished by the great mother. (Tao Te Ching, 20)

What is more of virtue than to live according to the way of all created things, undesiring, without contention, inhabited by a passionless peace? This is to live according to the Tao. Its wisdom? There is nothing to stick to...

The greatest virtue is to follow Tao and Tao alone. The Tao is elusive and intangible, oh, it is intangible and elusive, and yet within is form. Oh it is dim and dark, and yet within is essence. This essence is very real and therein lies faith. From the very beginning until now its name has never been forgotten. Thus, I perceive the creation. How do I know the ways of creation? Because of this. (Tao Te Ching, 21)

There is nothing to stick to and this can be read in one of two ways: firstly, there is nothing to which anyone can or could stick to, no guide, no code, no algorithm, no rulebook, no matrix, no morals, no set of facts or canonical interpretations; secondly, there is nothing to stick to, in which nothing is a special kind of something. So there is something positively conceived to stick to but it is a negative, a nothing, a void, a zero. It is empty, emptiness. It is whatever nothing as a something would be. A reading which holds both senses in tension is recommended...

How to gain without grasping. There is nothing to stick to...

Yield and overcome; Bend and be straight; Empty and be full; Wear out and be new; Have a little and gain; Have much and be confused. Therefore, the wise embrace the one and set an example to all. Not putting on a display, they shine forth. Not justifying themselves, they are distinguished. Not boasting, they receive recognition. Not bragging, they never falter. They do not quarrel, so no one quarrels with them. Therefore, the ancients say, 'Yield and overcome.' Is that an empty saying? Be really whole, and all things will come to you. (Tao Te Ching, 22)

That which you cultivate, you experience. To cultivate virtue, sow virtue, to be at one with all things, cultivate the openness of the Tao. There is nothing to stick to...

Only simple and quite words will ripen of themselves. For a whirlwind does not last a whole morning, nor does a sudden shower last a whole day. Who is the author? Heaven and earth! Even heaven and earth cannot make such violent things last long; how much truer is that of the rash

endeavours of human beings? Hence the one who cultivates the Tao is one with the Tao; The one who practices virtue is one with virtue; The one who courts loss is one with loss. To be one with the Tao is to be welcomed by the Tao; To be one with virtue is to be welcomed by virtue; To be one with loss is to be welcomed by loss. Deficiency of faith on your part entails faithlessness on the part of others. (Tao Te Ching, 23)

Each conditioned in their turn by something greater, all leading back to Tao. What, in the end, is the nature of things? There is nothing to stick to...

Something mysteriously formed, born before heaven and earth. In the silence and the void, standing alone and unchanging. Ever present and in motion, perhaps it is the mother of the Ten Thousand Things. I do not know its name, call it Tao. For lack of a better word, call it great. Being great, it flows. It flows far away. Having gone far, it returns. Therefore, 'Tao is great; heaven is great; earth is great; the king is also great.' These are the four great powers of the universe, and the king is one of them. Humanity follows the earth, earth follows heaven, heaven follows the Tao. Tao follows what is natural. (Tao Te Ching, 25)

Practice makes perfect when one is in the Way and nothing should go to waste. There is nothing to stick to...

Good works are trackless, good words are flawless, good planning isn't calculating. What is well closed has no bolt locking it, but cannot be opened. What is well bound has no rope confining it, but cannot be untied. Therefore, sages always consider it good to save people, so that there are no wasted people; they always consider it good to save beings, so that there are no wasted beings. So good people are teachers of people who are not good. People who are not good are students of people who are good. Those who do not honour teachers or care for students are greatly deluded, even if knowledgeable. This is called an essential subtlety. (Tao Te Ching, 27)

Balance will lead you to virtue, not extremes. Be like a child and live in the Infinite with simplicity. There is nothing to stick to...

Know the masculine, keep to the feminine, and be the Brook of the World. To be the Brook of the World is to move constantly in the path of virtue without swerving from it and to return again to infancy. Know the white, keep to the black, and be the Pattern of the World. To be the Pattern of the World is to move constantly in the path of virtue without erring a single step and to return again to the Infinite. Know the glorious, keep to the lowly, and be the Fountain of the World. To be the Fountain of the World is to live the abundant life of virtue and to return again to the primal simplicity. When primal simplicity diversifies it becomes useful vessels which, in the hands of the sage, becomes officers. Hence, 'a great tailor does little cutting.' (Tao Te Ching, 28)

The more you grasp, the more it slips through your fingers. The wisdom of Tao is balance and letting go. There is nothing to stick to...

Does anyone want to take the world and do what they want with it? I don't see how they can succeed. The world is a sacred vessel which must not be tampered with or grabbed after. To tamper with it is to spoil it and to grasp it is to lose it. In fact, for all things there is a time for going ahead and a time for following behind; a time for slow breathing and a time for heavy breathing; a time to grow in strength and a time to decay; a time to be up and a time to be down. Therefore, the sage avoids all extremes, excesses and extravagances. (Tao Te Ching, 29)

The wise love peace and hate war. In war, every victory is a funeral. There is nothing to stick to...

Good weapons are instruments of fear; all creatures hate them. Therefore, followers of Tao never use them. The wise one prefers the left, the one of war prefers the right. Weapons are instruments of fear: they are not a wise one's tools. A wise one uses them only when they have no choice, peace and quiet are dear to their heart and victory no cause for rejoicing. If you rejoice in victory then you delight in killing; if you delight in killing you cannot fulfill yourself. On happy occasions precedence is given to the left, on sad occasions to the right. In the army the general stands on the left. The commander-in-chief is on the right. This means that war is conducted like a funeral. When many people are being killed they should be mourned with heartfelt sorrow. This is why a victory must be observed like a funeral. (Tao Te Ching, 31)

The harmony of the world is the harmony of Tao; simple, peaceful and diverse. Forget intention and surrender to the Tao. There is nothing to stick to...

Tao is always nameless. Small as it is in its primal simplicity, it is inferior to the world. If only a ruler could cling to it, everything will render homage to them. Heaven and earth will be harmonized and send down sweet dew. Peace and order will reign among the people without any command from above. When once the primal simplicity diversified, different names appeared. Are there not enough names now? Is this not the time to stop? To know when to stop is to preserve ourselves from danger. The Tao is to the world what a great river or an ocean is to the streams and brooks. (Tao Te Ching, 32)

Others and the self, one must master both. Strength is having enough, mastery is being where you are. There is nothing to stick to...

Knowing others is wisdom; Knowing the self is enlightenment. Mastering others requires forces; mastering the self needs strength. The one who knows they have enough is rich. Perseverance is a sign of willpower. The one who stays where they are endures. To die but not to perish is to be eternally present. (Tao Te Ching, 33) Free of desire, yet it sustains and contains all things. That is Tao. To become great, don't try to be! There is nothing to stick to...

The way is broad, reaching to the left as well as right. The myriad creatures depend on it for life yet it claims no authority. It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit. It clothes and feeds the myriad creatures yet lays no claim to being their master. Forever free of desire, it can be called small; yet, as it lays no claim to being master when the myriad creatures turn to it, it can be called great. It is because it never attempts itself to be great that it succeeds in becoming great. (Tao Te Ching, 34)

Cultivate perception! There is nothing to stick to...

What is in the end to be shrunken, begins by being first stretched out. What is in the end to be weakened, begins by being made strong. What is in the end to be thrown down, begins by being first set on high. What is in the end to be despoiled, begins by being first richly endowed. Herein is the subtle wisdom of life; the soft and the weak overcomes the hard and the strong. Just as the fish must not leave the deeps, so the ruler must not display his weapons. (Tao Te Ching, 36)

What is virtue? Is it not found in the non-desiring, non-intentional Tao? Virtue does not seek itself. There is nothing to stick to...

High virtue is non-virtuous; therefore, it has virtue. Low virtue never frees itself from virtuousness; therefore, it has no virtue. High virtue makes no fuss and has no private ends to serve; low virtue not only fusses but has private ends to serve. High humanity fusses but has no private ends to serve. High morality not only fusses but has private ends to serve. High ceremony fusses but finds no response; then it tries to enforce itself with rolled up sleeves. Failing Tao, people resort to virtue. Failing virtue, people resort to humanity. Failing humanity, people resort

to morality. Failing morality, people resort to ceremony. Now ceremony is the merest husk of faith and loyalty. It is the beginning of all confusion and disorder. As to foreknowledge, it is only the embellishment of the Tao and the beginning of folly. Therefore, the full grown human being sets their heart upon the substance rather than the husk; upon the fruit rather than the flower. Truly, they prefer what is within to what is without. (Tao Te Ching, 38)

Returning, always returning, the Tao has no destination. It is the gentleness that overcomes all. All somethings come from Nothing. There is nothing to stick to...

The movement of the Tao consists in returning. The use of the Tao consists in softness. All things under heaven are born of being. Being is born of not being. (Tao Te Ching, 40)

The Yin and the Yang. There is nothing to stick to...

The Tao begot one. One begot two. Two begot three. And three begot the ten thousand things. The ten thousand things carry yin and embrace yang. They achieve harmony by combining these forces. People hate to be orphaned, widowed or worthless but this is how kings and lords describe themselves. For one gains by losing and loses by gaining. What others teach, I also teach; that is, 'a violent person will die a violent death!' This will be the essence of my teaching. (Tao Te Ching, 42)

Soft overcomes hard, nothing overcomes something. No action overcomes actions, no words overcomes words. Once you get it, it's world-changing. There is nothing to stick to...

The softest thing in the universe overcomes the hardest thing in the universe. That substance can enter where there is no room. Hence, I know the value of non-action. Teaching without words and work without doing are understood by few. (Tao Te Ching, 43)

Would you endure long? Have little, live simply, do not attach yourself to things. There is nothing to stick to...

As for your name and your body, which is the dearer? As for your body and your wealth, which is the more prized? As for gain and loss, which is the more painful? Thus, an excessive love for anything will cost you dear in the end. The storing up of too much goods will entail a heavy loss. To know when you have enough is to be immune from disgrace. To know when to stop is to be preserved from perils. Only thus can you endure. (Tao Te Ching, 44)

Your enemy is desire and its cure is being content to have enough. There is nothing to stick to...

When the Tao is present in the universe, the horses haul manure. When the Tao is absent from the universe, war horses are bred outside the city. There is no greater sin than desire, no greater curse than discontent, no greater misfortune than wanting something for oneself. Therefore, the one who knows that enough is enough will always have enough. (Tao Te Ching, 46)

Here is a riddle: the knowing that is not about going, the knowing that is not about doing, the knowing that is not about looking. What is it? There is nothing to stick to...

Without going outside, you may know the whole world. Without looking through the window, you may see the ways of heaven. The farther you go, the less you know. Thus, the sage knows without travelling; they see without looking; they work without doing. (Tao Te Ching, 47)

If you would walk in the way of Tao you must learn non-action. You must learn to decrease and not increase daily. Knowledge is not accumulating; it is letting go. There is nothing to stick to...

The pursuit of learning is to increase day after day, the pursuit of Tao is to decrease day after day. It is to decrease and further decrease until the point of taking no action. No action is taken, and yet nothing is left undone. An empire is often brought to order by having no activity. If one

likes to undertake activity, they are not qualified to govern the empire. (Tao Te Ching, 48) Would you be wise? Be selfless, humble, kind, faithful, to all alike without partiality. There is nothing to stick to...

The sage has no interests of their own, but takes the interests of the people as their own. They are kind to the kind; they are also kind to the unkind: for virtue is kind. They are faithful to the faithful; they are also faithful to the unfaithful: for virtue is faithful. In the midst of the world, the sage is shy and self-effacing. For the sake of the world they keep their heart in its nebulous state. All the people strain their ears and eyes: the sage only smiles like an amused infant. (Tao Te Ching, 49)

There is the Way (Tao) and there is Virtue (Te). From these all things arise and are nourished. There is also matter and environment. What is the nature of all things? There is nothing to stick to...

All things arise from Tao. They are nourished by Virtue. They are formed from matter. They are shaped by environment. Thus, the ten thousand things all respect Tao and honour Virtue. Respect of Tao and honour of Virtue are not demanded, but they are in the nature of things. Therefore, all things arise from Tao. By Virtue, they are nourished, developed, cared for, sheltered, comforted, grown and protected. Creating without claiming, doing without taking credit, guiding without interfering: this is Primal Virtue. (Tao Te Ching, 51)

Those in the way of Tao do not chase after riches, they are not sidetracked by self-aggrandizing schemes. And yet people prefer these! There is nothing to stick to...

If only I had the tiniest grain of wisdom, I should walk in the Great Way. And my only fear would be to stray from it. The Great Way is very smooth and straight; and yet people prefer devious paths! The court is very clean and well garnished, but the fields are very weedy and wild. And the granaries are very empty! They wear gorgeous clothes, they carry sharp swords, they surfeit themselves with food and drink, they possess more riches than they can use! They are the heralds of brigandage! As for the Tao, what do they know about it? (Tao Te Ching, 53)

Cultivate virtue, embrace it – in yourself, in family, in community, in the state, in the world. But it starts with you! There is nothing to stick to...

What is well planted cannot be uprooted, what is well embraced cannot slip away. Your descendants will carry on the ancestral sacrifice for generation without end, cultivate virtue in your own person, and it becomes a genuine part of you. Cultivate it in the family, and it will abide. Cultivate it in the community, and it will live and grow. Cultivate it in the state, and it will flourish abundantly. Cultivate it in the world, and it will become universal. Hence, a person must be judged as a person; a family as a family; a community as a community; a state as a state; the world as the world. How do I know about the world? By what is within me. (Tao Te Ching, 54)

A union with all things; not based on knowing, not based on talking. It is selfless! There is nothing to stick to...

Those who know do not talk. Those who talk do not know. Keep your mouth closed. Guard your senses. Temper your sharpness. Mask your brightness. Be at one with the dust of the earth. This is the primal union. The one who has achieved this state is unconcerned with friends and enemies, with good and harm, with honour and disgrace. This, therefore, is the highest state of human being. (Tao Te Ching, 56)

Justice without desire, master without doing, the wisdom of the light touch! There is nothing to stick to...

Rule a nation with justice. Wage a war with surprise moves. Become master of the universe without striving. How do I know this is so? Because of this! The more laws and restrictions there are, the poorer the people become. The sharper the men's weapons, the more trouble in the land. The more ingenious and wily people are, the more strange things happen. The more rules and regulations, the more thieves and robbers. Therefore, the sage says: I take no action and people are reformed. I enjoy peace and people become honest. I do nothing and people become rich. I have no desires and people return to the good and simple life. (Tao Te Ching, 57)

To be frugal is to be royalty and to rule over all! There is nothing to stick to...

In governing a people and in serving heaven there is nothing like frugality. To be frugal is to return before straying. To return before straying is to have a double reserve of virtue. To have a double reserve of virtue is to overcome everything. To overcome everything is to reach an invisible height. Only the one who has reached an invisible height can have a kingdom. Only the one who has got the mother of a kingdom can last long. This is the way to be deep-rooted and firm-planted in the Tao, the secret of long life and lasting vision. (Tao Te Ching, 59) The actions of the wise. There is nothing to stick to...

Practice non-action. Work without doing. Taste the flavourless. Magnify the small, increase the few. Reward bitterness with care. See simplicity in the complicated. Achieve greatness through little things. In the universe the difficult things are done as if they are easy. In the universe great acts are made up of small deeds. The sage does not attempt anything very big, and thus achieves greatness. Easy promises make for little trust. Taking things lightly results in great difficulty. Because the sage always confronts difficulties, they are never experienced. (Tao Te Ching, 63)

Beware those who know too much, who pride themselves on cleverness! There is nothing to stick to...

In the beginning, those who knew the Tao did not try to enlighten others, but kept it hidden. Why is it so hard to rule? Because people are so clever. Rulers who try to use cleverness cheat the country. Those who rule without cleverness are a blessing to the land. These are the two alternatives, understanding these is Primal Virtue. Primal Virtue is deep and far. It leads all things back towards the great oneness. (Tao Te Ching, 65)

You will know the wise by their humility. There is nothing to stick to...

How does the sea come to rule over streams? Because it is lower than they! Hence, it rules over all streams! Therefore, the sage reigns over the people by being humble in speech, and leads the people by going behind them. Thus it is that when a sage stands above the people they do not feel the heaviness of that one's weight; and when that one stands in front of the people, they do not feel hurt. Therefore, all the world pushes them forward without getting tired of them. Just because they strive with nobody, nobody can ever strive with them. (Tao Te Ching, 66)

The three treasures... Compassion, Frugality, Humility. There is nothing to stick to...

The whole world says, I'm Great; Great, yet unlike everyone else. But it is precisely because I'm unlike everyone else that I am therefore able to be great. Were I like everyone else for a long time now I'd have seemed insignificant and small. I constantly have three treasures: Hold onto them and treasure them: The first is compassion; The second is frugality; The third is not presuming to be at the forefront of the world. Now, its because one is compassionate that one can be courageous; its because one is frugal that one can therefore be magnanimous; its because one does not presume to be at the forefront of the world that one can be at the head of all. Now, if you abandon compassion yet try to be courageous, and if you abandon frugality yet try to be

magnanimous, and if you try to abandon staying behind yet try to go to the fore, then you will die. If with compassion you attack then you will win; if you are defending, you'll stand firm. It is the means by which heaven protects and guards. (Tao Te Ching, 67)

Not striving. There is nothing to stick to...

A good soldier is not violent. A good fighter is not angry. A good winner is not vengeful. A good employer is humble. This is known as the Virtue of not striving. This is known as ability to deal with people. This since ancient times has been known as the ultimate unity with heaven. (Tao Te Ching, 68)

Knowledge and ignorance, it is best to be wise regarding both! There is nothing to stick to...

To realise that our knowledge is ignorance, this is noble insight. To regard our ignorance as knowledge, this is mental sickness. Only when when are sick of our sickness shall we cease to be sick. The sage is not sick, being sick of sickness. This is the secret of health. (Tao Te Ching, 71)

Live in accordance with the Tao, without striving, and all things will come to you. There is nothing to stick to...

A brave and passionate person will kill or be killed. A brave and calm person will always preserve life. Of these two, which is good and which is harmful? Some things are not favoured by heaven, who knows why? Even the sage is unsure of this. The Tao of heaven does not strive, and yet it overcomes. It does not speak, and yet it is answered. It does not ask for things, and yet is supplied with all its needs. It seems to have no aim and yet its purpose is fulfilled. Heaven's net casts wide. Though its meshes are coarse, nothing slips through. (Tao Te Ching, 73)

People love to interfere! People love to make too much of things! There is nothing to stick to...

Why are the people starving? Because those above them are taxing them too heavily. That is why they are starving. Why are the people hard to manage? Because those above them are fussy and have private ends to serve. That is why they are hard to manage. Why do the people think nothing of death? Because, having little to live on, they know better than to value life too much. (Tao Te Ching, 75)

Humility and weakness, not might and greatness, is to be most treasured. There is nothing to stick to...

When someone is alive, they are soft and supple. When they are dead, they become hard and rigid. When a plant is living, it is soft and tender. When it is dead, it becomes withered and dry. Hence, the hard and rigid belongs to the company of the dead; the soft and supple belong to the company of the living. Therefore, a mighty army tends to fall by its own weight, just as dry wood is ready for the axe. The great and mighty will be laid low, the humble and weak will be exalted. (Tao Te Ching, 76)

The way of Tao is to recognise humility and be humble. There is nothing to stick to...

The Tao of heaven is like the bending of a bow: the high is lowered and the low is raised. If the string is too long, it is shortened; if there is not enough, it is made longer. The Tao of heaven is to take from those who have too much and give to those who do not have enough. The human way is different. Human beings take from those who do not have enough to give to those who already have too much. What human being has more than enough and gives to the world? Only the one of Tao. Therefore, the sage works without recognition. The sage achieves what has to be done without dwelling on it. The sage does not try to show their knowledge. (Tao Te Ching, 77)

The mountain is made of hard rock, yet the softest stream cuts through it! The supple tree bends whilst the hard tree snaps. There is nothing to stick to...

Under heaven nothing is more soft and yielding than water. Yet, for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better. It has no equal. The weak can overcome the strong; the supple can overcome the stiff. Under heaven everyone knows this. Yet no one puts it into practice. Therefore, the sage says: The one who takes upon themselves the humiliation of the people is fit to rule them. The one who takes upon themselves the country's disasters deserve to be the ruler over all. The truth often sounds paradoxical. (Tao Te Ching, 78)

Peace in simplicity. There is nothing to stick to...

A small country has fewer people. Though there are machines that can work ten to a hundred times faster than people, they are not needed. The people take death seriously and do not travel far. Though they have boats and carriages, no one uses them. Though they have armour and weapons, no one displays them. They return to the knotting of rope in place of writing. Their food is plain and good, their clothes fine but simple, their homes are secure; they are happy in their ways. Though they live within sight of their neighbours, and crowing cocks and barking dogs are heard across the way, yet they leave each other in peace while they grow old and die. (Tao Te Ching, 80)

The way of the sage is to do their duty and not strive with anyone! There is nothing to stick to...

Truthful words are not beautiful, beautiful words are not truthful. Good people do not argue, those who argue are not good. The wise are not users of erudition, users of erudition are not wise. The sage never tries to store things up; the more they do for others, the more they have; the more they give to others, the greater their abundance. The way of heaven is to benefit and not to harm. The way of the sage is to do their duty, not to strive with anyone. (Tao Te Ching, 81)

The Book of Zhuangzi and Nothing to Stick to

54/ So: where to go if your anarchism is not to be conceived of as somewhere articulated within the broadly socialist, political matrix which anarchism has been conceived of as being within in the last 200 years [sometimes with an inability to see it as anything else]? Perhaps to that expressed within the words, thoughts and ideas of the *Zhuangzi*, a Chinese text that may have some connection to the 4th century BCE figure of the same name who, if not the writer of the whole book, is at least its inspiration. What follows are selections of the book for readers to ponder ...

55/ Note 1. Not conceiving of one's anarchistic instincts as "political" in a context of 200 years of socialist libertarian anarchism does not, however, mean that one does not have, or is not allowed to have, political thoughts or opinions. Too often, in fact, I find myself drawn into the modern political pantomime of lies, bad actors, deception, and all the rest that is often perpetrated – quite openly – by people simply in it for themselves. The simple fact of the matter, however, is that civilisation does now exist and has for a millennium or three. One of the issues for an anarchist born since its rise is how one is going to deal with that and with the fact that anarchism only becomes necessary because civilisation and its politics exist. There are those who want to aggressively confront it and there are equally those who, I think in error, want to take part in it. It becomes a question of how much one becomes entangled in these things and how one stays true to one's anarchist instincts, thoughts and impulses. To engage or not to engage? If one is in the world it is hard not to have thoughts or ideas about how it is going.

56/ Note 2. In 2009 the writer, anarchist and occultist, Alan Moore, said the following:

"I believe that all other political states are in fact variations or outgrowths of a basic state of anarchy; after all, when you mention the idea of anarchy to most people they will tell you what a bad idea it is because the biggest gang would just take over. Which is pretty much how I see contemporary society. We live in a badly developed anarchist situation in which the biggest gang has taken over and have declared that it is not an anarchist situation – that it is a capitalist or a communist situation. But I tend to think that anarchy is the most natural form of politics for a human being to actually practice."

This idea of Moore's set me thinking. Traditional political thinking will tell you that a capitalist, consumerist or, alternatively, state communist state, or even simply a state, is not and cannot be "anarchist". Government by a government is not anarchy because governments have power, which they inevitably exercise, and they make laws, impose various forms of order and prohibit certain activities or even certain forms of existence. But what Moore says above actually questions that notion. Yes, we may ourselves live in a state with some kind with a government. Certain ways of operation and prevalent ideas may be apparent. But have these states, thoughts and governments actually remade the way of the world or have they, instead, simply imposed

their own fictions upon it ? Put it like this: if no human beings existed, and perhaps had never existed, the world would be a certain way, in a state of anarchy that is not anarchy because it is just the way things are if they go about their business. Now, introduce the human beings back into this world. Is the world now changed — or is it now that there are human beings knocking around who have the ability to imagine it is something else, whatever they want it to be, and they can rhetorically reinforce this fiction in the minds of others? If you are told an idea is true you might well come to accept the idea. Assuming the idea has enough realism about it that your daily experience of life doesn't immediately show it to be a stupid, unsupportable idea, you might have little daily resistance to believing it. But that doesn't make it the way of the world; that simply means such understandings are not contradicted by your daily experience of the world. It is conceivable that you might spend your whole life accepting something as true but it could none the less be false. Moore's idea is essentially this, that we have been told at various times and places various fictions about the contexts of our lives such that we come to accept them as true, given and actual: but, he goes on to say, all that is actually happening if you strip the fiction away again is exactly what was happening before: this world is just going about its business as it can . In effect, Moore is saying, to use the metaphor with which I started out in this book, that we have all been induced to dream dreams. Or perhaps dreaming is actually us operating as we should, imposing our fictional frameworks on that which we regard as reality. Thinking the world is a certain way, we accept it and act as if it is. But the point, the very pertinent point, is that we are not forced either to believe or to accept that it is these things . We can choose to ignore such understandings and live another way. This will most likely not be without consequences — other people with other beliefs exist — but it is certainly possible. The human-constructed world is built by human beings who have certain beliefs and the power they have to put those fictions into practice. The world is neither capitalist nor communist — which is simply two of these fictions — but it is, as Moore seems to suggest, still anarchist in the sense of simply going about its business as it can . All the rest is fiction on top through which you must filter your experience of life, colouring said experience, and the beliefs you hold about the world which it helps create, as you do. At least, if you accept this particular interpretation it is. Perhaps it comes down to this when the dreamer dreams their dream: the best way to get someone to live as you want them to live is to get them to believe the things you want them to believe. And, most probably, having done that, they will then behave as you want them to behave entirely of their own volition for they have now internalised the requisite beliefs and regard them as their own... And now back to the scheduled programming in the book of Zhuangzi ...

57/ The relativity of knowledge. A cicada taught a dove, saying, "I try with great effort to fly up into a tree but its so difficult and gravity fights against me so what chance do you have of flying high into the sky and travelling miles and miles away?"

If you go into the woods for the day you only need a packed lunch. But what if you are travelling 100 miles or 1000?

The great and the small require different understandings. Think of something that lives less than a day: what does it know of day and night? What does something which lives only a few days or maybe a week know of seasons? Is that which only experiences summer capable of understanding winter?

58/ The perfect person has no self.
The spiritual person has no merit.
The holy person has no fame.

59/ Hui Tzu spoke to Zhuangzi telling him that he had a big tree full of knots and twisted branches which no carpenter would work on even though it is beside the road. It is useless. Then he told Zhuangzi that he used big useless words like this tree and that everyone ignored them.

Zhuangzi thought for a moment then asked Hui Tzu if he knew of the wildcat or weasel which spring everywhere, east and west, high and low, but nevertheless end up getting caught in a trap or a net. Then he asked him to consider the yak which is huge... but it cannot use its size to catch rats. Then he asked Hui Tzu why he didn't plant the big, useless tree in the middle of nowhere so that he might wander one day and lay down under its shade. If it is so useless then surely no one would ever cut it down. The use of the useless.

60/ Our words are not just hot air. Words work because they say something, but the problem is that, if we cannot define a word's meaning, it doesn't really say anything. Is it possible that there really is something here? Or does it really mean nothing? is it possible to make a proper case for it being any different from the chirruping of chicks? How is it that we have the Way so obscured that we have to distinguish between true and false? What has clouded our words so that we can have both what is and what is not? How can it be that the Way goes off and is no longer? How can it be that words are found but are not understood? When the Way is obscured by pettiness and the words are obscured by elaboration, then we end up having the "this is, this is not" of the Confucians and the Mohists, with what one of them calls reality being denied by the other. And what the other calls real disputed by the first. If we want to confound what they call right and confirm what they call wrong, we need to shed light on both of them.

61/ Nothing exists which is not "that", nothing exists which is not "this". I cannot look at something through someone else's eyes, I can only truly know something which I know. Therefore "that" comes out of "this" and "this" arises from "that". That is why we say that "that" and "this" are born from each other.

62/ Compare birth with death, compare death with life; compare what is possible with what is not possible and compare what is not possible with what is possible; because there is, there is not, and because there is not, there is.

63/ What is, is, what is not, is not.
The way is made because we walk it,
things become what they are called.
Why is this so? Surely because this is so.
Why is this not so? Surely because this is not so.
Everything has what is innate,
everything has what is necessary.
Nothing is not something, nothing is not so.
Therefore, take a stalk of wheat and a pillar,
a leper or a beauty,
the great and the insecure,
the cunning and the odd:
all these are like to the Way.
In their difference is their completeness;
and their completeness is their difference.

64/ Through the Way they are all seen as one, regardless of their completeness or difference, by those who are capable of such extended vision. Such a person has no need for distinctions but follows the ordinary view. The ordinary view is firmly set on the ground of usefulness. The

usefulness of something defines its use; the use is its flexibility; its flexibility is its essence and from this it comes to a stop. We stop but do not know why we stop, and this is called the Way.

65/ A monkey trainer was giving out acorns and he said, "In the morning I will give you three acorns and in the evening you will get four." The monkeys were very upset at this and so he said, "Alright, come up in the morning you will get four and in the evening, three." This pleased the monkeys no end. His two statements were essentially the same, but got different reactions from the monkeys. He gained what he wanted by his skill. So it is with the sage, who manages to harmonise right and wrong and is content to abide by the Natural Equality of Heaven.

66/ By the light shining out of chaos, the sage is guided; not making use of distinctions but led on by the light.

67/ There is the beginning; there is not as yet any beginning of the beginning; there is not as yet beginning not to be a beginning of the beginning. There is what is, and there is what is not, and it is not easy to say whether what is not, is not; or whether what is, is.

68/ Heaven and Earth and I were born at the same time, and all life and I are one.

69/ Don't even start, let's just stay put.

70/ How can I know that what I say I know it's not actually what I don't know? Likewise, how can I know that what I think I don't know is not really what I do know?

71/ If someone sleeps in a damp place, he will ache all over and he will be half paralysed, but is it the same for an eel? If someone climbs a tree, he will be frightened and shaking, but is it so for a monkey? Out of these three, which is wisest about where to live? Humans eat meat, deer consume grass, centipedes devour snakes and owls and crows enjoy mice. Of these four, which has the best taste? Monkeys mate with each other and deer go with deer. People say some women are the most beautiful women in the world but fish seeing them will swim away from them, birds seeing them will fly off into the air and deer will run away. Of these, who really knows true beauty? As I see it, benevolence and righteousness, also the ways of right and wrong, are completely interwoven. I do not think I can know the difference between them!

72/ The perfect human being is pure spirit. They do not feel the heat of the burning deserts nor the cold of the vast waters. They are not frightened by the lightning which can split open mountains, nor by the storms that can whip up the seas. Such a person rides the clouds and mounts on the sun and moon and wanders across and beyond the four seas. Neither death nor life concern them, nor are they interested in what is good or bad!

73/ How can the wise one sit beside the sun and the moon and embrace the universe? Because she brings all things together in harmony, she rejects difference and confusion and ignores status and power. While ordinary people rush busily around, the sage seems stupid and ignorant, but to her all life is one and united. All life is simply what it is and all appear to her to be doing what they rightly should.

74/ Come the morning, those who dream of the drunken feast may weep and moan; when the morning comes, those who dream of weeping and moaning go hunting in the fields. When they dream, they don't know it is a dream. Indeed, in their dreams they may think they are interpreting dreams, only when they wake up do they know it was a dream. Eventually there comes the day of reckoning and awakening, and then we shall know it was all a great dream. Only fools think they are now awake and that they really know what is going on, playing the prince and then playing the servant. What fools! The Master and you are both living in a dream. When I say a dream, I am also dreaming. This very saying is a deception. If after 10,000 years we could once meet a truly great sage, one who understands, it would seem as if it had only been a morning.

75/ To wait for one voice to bring it all together is as pointless as waiting for no one. Bring all things together under the Equality of Heaven, allow their process of change to go on unimpeded, and learn to grow old. What do I mean by bringing everything together under the Equality of Heaven? With regard to what is right and wrong, I say not being is being and being is not being. But let us not get caught up in discussing this. Forget about life, forget about worrying about right and wrong. Plunge into the unknown and the endless until you find your place there!

76/ The Outline said to the Shadow, "First you are on the move, then you are standing still; you sit down and then you stand up. Why can't you make up your mind?" Shadow replied, "Do I have to look like something else to be what I am? Does this something else itself have to rely on yet another something? Do I have to depend upon the scales of a snake or the wings of a cicada? How can I tell how things are? How can I tell how things are not?"

77/ Once upon a time Zhuangzi dreamt that he was a butterfly flitting around and enjoying himself. He had no idea he was Zhuangzi. Then suddenly he woke up and he was Zhuangzi again. But he could not tell: had he been Zhuangzi dreaming he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was now Zhuangzi? However, there must be some sort of difference between Zhuangzi and the butterfly! We call this the transformation of things.

78/ Our life has a boundary but there is no boundary to knowledge. To use what has a boundary to pursue what is limitless is dangerous; with this knowledge, if we still go after knowledge, we will run into trouble. Do not do what is good in order to gain praise. If you do what is bad be sure to avoid the punishment. Follow the Middle Course, for this is the way to keep yourself together, to sustain your life, to care for your parents and to live for many years.

79/ I ignore my sense and follow my spirit.

80/ When someone is born it is because they are due to be born. When they die, it is entirely natural. If you are prepared to accept this and flow with it, then sorrow and joy cannot touch you.

81/ Everyone knows the usefulness of the useful but no one knows the usefulness of the useless!

82/ All life is one.

83/ A person without feet has little love for shoes.

84/ If virtue is foremost, the physical body is ignored. When people do not ignore what they should ignore, but ignore what they should not ignore, this is known as true ignorance. The sage sees their role as that of a wanderer, sees knowledge as a curse, convention as a glue, virtue as just a means, and effort as common trade. The sage has no great plans, so what use have they for knowledge? They make no divisions, so what use have they for glue? They have no problems, so what use have they for virtue? They have no career, so what need have they for common trade? These four, they are the nourishment of Heaven. Fed by Heaven, they are nourished by Heaven. As they love being nourished by Heaven, they have no need of humanity! They have the form of a human being but not the emotions of a human being. Because they have the form of a human being, they can be amongst human beings, but not having the emotions of a human being they do not have to follow the ways of right and wrong. Inconsequential and small, they stay among human beings! Substantial and large, they are at one with Heaven!

85/ When I say a human being has no emotions what I mean by this is someone who does not allow either the good or the bad to have any effect upon them. They let all things be and allow life to continue in its own way.

86/ The true human being . What is a true human being? The true human being of old did not fight against poverty, nor did they look for fulfillment through riches — for they had no great plans. Therefore, they never regretted any failure, nor exulted in success. They could scale the heights without fear, plumb the depths without difficulties and go through fire without pain. This is the kind of person whose understanding has lifted them up towards the Way. The true human being breathes from their feet up , ordinary people just breathe from their throat. The true human being of old did not hold onto life, nor did they fear death. They arrived without expectation and left without resistance. They went calmly, they came calmly, and that was that. They did not set out to forget their origin, nor were they interested in what would become of them. They loved to receive anything but also forgot what they had received and gave it away. They did not give precedence to the heart but to the Way, nor did they prefer the ways of humanity to those of Heaven. This is what is known as a true human being.

87/ Viewing knowledge as being that which is appropriate, follow the natural course of events; viewing virtue as that which is proper, act spontaneously.

88/ The cosmos gives us the burden of a physical form, makes life a struggle, gives us rest in old age and peace in death. What makes life good, therefore, also makes death good.

89/ The sage goes where nothing escapes them, and rests contented there with them. They take pleasure in an early death, in old age, in the origin and in the end and see them all as equally good: they should be an example to others.

90/ The great Way has both reality and expression, but it does nothing and has no form.

It can be passed on, but not received.

It can be obtained, but not seen.

It is rooted in its own self, existing before Heaven and Earth were born, indeed for eternity.

It gives divinity to the spirit and to the gods.

It brought to life Heaven and Earth.

91/ You might think that teaching the Way to a person of genius would be easy. But no! One such was taught for three days and they were able to ignore worldly matters. Having dispensed with such things, they were taught for seven more days so that they were then able to ignore all external matters. Having, thus, disposed of all external matters, they were taught for nine days whereupon they found their own being irrelevant. Having found their own self irrelevant, they saw with true clarity. Having seen with true clarity, they could see by the One. Seeing by the One, they could ignore both past and present. Having ignored both past and present, they were able to enter where there is neither death nor life. Life is not death and the coming to birth is not life. They could follow anything, they could receive anything. To them, all was being destroyed, all was being built. This is known as Tranquillity in Struggle. Tranquillity in Struggle means perfection.

92/ Anyone who can conceive of nothingness as their head, life as their back, and death as their tail and who knows that death and birth, being and no-being, are one and the same — one like this shall be our friend.

93/ Those who go quietly with the flow of nature are not worried by either joy or sorrow. People like these were considered in the past as having achieved freedom from bondage. Those who cannot free themselves are constrained by things.

94/ When a mother and father tell a child to go somewhere, be that east, west, south or north, the child obeys. Yin and yang are the mother and father of humanity. They have brought me

close to death and if I disobey this would be just perversity. My death is not their problem! The cosmos gives me form, brings me to birth, guides me into old age and settles me in death.

95/ Fish enjoy water, humans enjoy the Way. Enjoying water, the fish stick to the pond and find all they need to survive there. Enjoying the Way, people do nothing and their lives are fulfilled.

96/ A human being alone is only alone when compared to others, but they are alongside Heaven.

97/ If you have had the practices of human beings branded upon you, how can you now expect to be helped to meander alone in freedom and aimlessness, enjoying things as they happen in the process of change?

98/ Let Your heart journey in simplicity. Be one with that which is beyond definition. Let things be what they are. Have no personal views. This is how everything under heaven is ruled.

99/ In the great Void, all is equal.

100/ Do not hanker for fame. Do not make plans. Do not try to do things. Do not try to master knowledge. Hold what is but do not hold it to be anything. Work with all that comes from Heaven, but do not seek to hold it. Just be empty. The perfect human's heart is like a mirror. It does not search after things. It does not look for things. It does not seek knowledge, just responds. As a result, such a one can handle everything and is not harmed by anything.

101/ Everything has its own circumstances. Everything is made as it is by the ways of nature, without understanding why or how. Everything achieves what is intended, but does not understand why or how.

102/ In a time of perfect virtue, people live side by side with the birds and beasts, sharing the world in common with all life. No one knows of distinctions such as nobility or peasantry! Totally without wisdom but with a virtue that does not disappear, totally without desire, they are then genuinely simple. If people are truly simple then they can follow their authentic nature.

103/ The crime of the craftsman is to use the elements of the world to make artefacts. The error of the sage is taking the Way and Virtue to make them into benevolence and righteousness.

104/ Create weights and measures to judge by and people will steal by weights and measures; create balances and weights and people will steal by balances and weights: create contracts and legal agreements to inspire trust and people will steal by contracts and legal agreements; create benevolence and righteousness to ensure honesty and even in this benevolence and righteousness will teach them to steal.

105/ The sage is a means of control so the world should not see him clearly. Thus, if sages and wisdom are abandoned, great robbers would cease; destroy the jade and shatter the pearls, then petty thieves will not appear; burn the accounts and rip up the contracts, and people will return to simplicity; break up the weights and measures and the people will no longer argue; obliterate the laws of the world the sages have made, then the people can begin to be reasoned with.

106/ Knowledge and confusion. Everything under Heaven is in a state of distress, all because of the pursuit of knowledge. Everything in the world knows how to seek for knowledge that they do not have, but do not know how to find what they already know. Everything in the world knows how to condemn what they dislike, but does not know how to condemn what they have which is wrong. This is what causes such immense confusion. It is as if the brightness of the sun and the moon had been eclipsed above, while down below the hills and streams have lost their power, as though the natural flow of the four seasons has been broken. There is no humble insect,

not even any plant, that has not lost its innate nature. This is the consequence for the world of seeking after knowledge.

107/ What is it that has caused confusion for everything under Heaven? It is that good and honest people are ignored while spineless flatterers are advanced. It is that the quiet and calm of actionless action is cast aside and pleasure is taken in argument.

108/ The preceding fifty one notes lay out thought from the first ten of thirty three chapters of the book of Zhuangzi. We are, of course, there moving in a completely different world to that of the last 200 years of socialistically understood, politicised anarchism. What is said in those notes is not of direct relevance to Proudhon or Stirner, Kropotkin or Bakunin, and how they think of anarchism. And yet I see it as more fundamentally anarchist than anything any of those socially concerned and politically involved writers, thinkers and activists ever said. This is because this material is about the anarchism of everything, not just politics or the political situation, and so about the anarchism at the heart of each individual because it is about the anarchism at the heart of existence itself. Ever since I have come to be thinking about anarchism I have noticed that both those who call themselves anarchists and those who don't, but who might potentially be asked what anarchism is, conceive of it almost completely and to a man in the political way. They think of it as a perhaps extreme or most thorough-going form of socialist politics in which, somehow, current hegemonies are smashed [violence is often imagined on both sides in thinking about such anarchism] and, depending on whether you are in favour of it or not, the biggest gang are then left in charge or people are freed from the power that formerly controlled them to live their own freely chosen lives.

109/ There are lots of things wrong with this conception of anarchism and the main one in my eyes is that anarchism is conceived of as merely political. And it is merely political for anarchism itself, and a state of anarchy, is simply so much more than this.

110/ The light regarding this begins to dawn on us if we dwell, once more, on the statement Alan Moore made in 2009: "I believe that all other political states are in fact variations or out-growths of a basic state of anarchy; after all, when you mention the idea of anarchy to most people they will tell you what a bad idea it is because the biggest gang would just take over. Which is pretty much how I see contemporary society." Now that "basic state of anarchy", to which Moore refers, is not simply a political state of anarchy; it is, for want of a better term, an ontological state of anarchy. Moore, as I interpret him, is saying that the state of being, of existence, is an anarchistic state. We live and move and have our being in anarchy. So, from this point of view, we do not need to create anarchistic political states because, quite simply, that is already the state of nature. And it has never changed because it never could change. From this perspective, whether you call the political system in your country capitalist or communist, it is, either way, simply a fiction imposed upon the anarchistic state of nature from that very anarchy. Surprise! The anarchy never went away and will never need to be brought back because, in its current iteration, in its very operation, this is what anarchy looks like right now. As Moore puts it, if anarchy is "the rule of the biggest gang", and if what we now see is the biggest gang in charge, just as many people seem to expect from anarchy, well then we have a match. Human political actions don't change or remove the anarchy of the world — they constitute it! It is what they are made of. They are anarchy in operation. What we then take issue with is not if the world is capitalist or anarchist or communist or anarchist, but with the operations of, and the distribution of, power within the world. The world is and remains anarchic; it can be no other. The issue political anarchists and others are more properly concerned with is "Who has the power?" which is

a political and ideological question regarding which fiction we see the world through the eyes of, which dream we want people to dream. If we were awake, however, we would find the anarchy that is existence, an anarchy that never went away. It still is, and always was, there.

111/ Things like the book of Zhuangzi should be helping us to understand this point that we only live in a fiction of capitalism or communism that has been set as a lens in front of our eyes to make a more anarchistic state of existence seem like something else, something much like a dream it wants us to start taking for reality and so thinking and acting in accordance with. For what is the picture of the world this book is setting out? It is saying that human intentions and deliberations can only make things worse, that the way of all things is without care or concern, an "actionless action". It describes the Way, its understanding of the path of existence, as simply going about its business. As I read it, it does not imagine that this can be either stopped or changed. It only seems to suggest that we will be frustrated if we ignore it or attempt to act against its nature. And, surely, it is not hard to show how the egotistical imaginings of human beings often result in [often self-inflicted] pain, misery and disaster. But the key point here is this: existence is anarchy. This never stops because existence never stops going on its way. Things can only be what they are. The Way progresses as what it is.

112/ Looked at like this, thinking of anarchism as a kind of politics is to severely limit its remit to the point of a total misunderstanding of it. In fact, this is not anarchism at all but merely a political anarchism. Like capitalism and communism, this is simply another lens through which to view the native anarchy of reality and actuality. This, I think, is why I've never really been attracted to it and why I have next to no interest in it. What is a politically anarchist lens through which to view the world, a fiction of political anarchy in which to act out one's life, when set against the native anarchy of all existence itself, the actionless action of all things, the what can happen that will happen? If one wants to get to grips with one's existence one needs to get the whole context, the context of everything, and not merely concern oneself with bits of it. Since life is, and always will be, more than politics, then life it is which is the thing to be contextualised and "understood". It is my belief that Zhuangzi does this better than Kropotkin, that Diogenes does this better than Bakunin. The former understand life as something other than a politics they largely ignore, the latter see life as politics. But if anarchism is to be understood as something that is about human being, and about how that being interacts and interfaces with all being, with existence itself, then it can never be reduced to politics. Indeed, it is no more to do with politics, in that case, than it is to do with any other sphere of human life. It is my view that the impetus to an anarchism that some politically anarchist human beings seek comes from that much more absolute understanding of anarchy in which it is suggested everything that is takes part. Why, indeed, be politically anarchist unless you are taking part in something more natural, more holistic and more in tune with reality when left to its own devices? Taoists call this the Way, Cynics thought of it as physis, the way of nature, but, whatever you call it, it is the wider context for an anarchism of any kind at all. All anarchisms are, in the end, rooted in the anarchism that is existence. If not, they are just another dream, just one more fictive lens.

113/ It is for this reason that whatever an anarchism of life is, and life understood in its widest possible sense, then that is what I am interested in when I think of anarchism. This may be understood spiritually if one is prepared to entertain metaphors of immateriality, or, at least, metaphors which extend beyond the material, as any person wise enough not to limit existence to a human being's rather strict boundaries of experience might wish to. Life, I believe, is about much more than a masturbatory concern with oneself or one's material conditions. Human beings, even life

on Earth, are only a miniscule piece of the whole. Yet we are part of the whole; that is where we come from and that is where we are going. It is the anarchy of the whole that we partake in. Our vision, I say, our visions, need to be much bigger than they often are when we talk about anarchism. There is more to anarchy than who is in control. Indeed, it is in getting to grips with anarchy as an all-encompassing context for existence that control, and power, will themselves be radically [re-]contextualised. And so ...

114/ If the nature of everything under Heaven is not distorted, if the world's Virtue is not despoiled, then what need is there to govern the world?

115/ Destroy the sage, throw away wisdom, and the whole world will have great order.

116/ The disruption of the ways of Heaven distresses the true being of things, halting the fulfillment of Heaven's Mysteries. This causes the animals to disperse, the birds to sing throughout the night, misfortune to hit the crops and the woods, and disaster to blight the very insects themselves. Alas, all this is caused by the people's error of thinking they know how to rule!

117/ Strengthen your heart. Remain sure in actionless action, and all things will transform themselves. Reject your body, throw out hearing and eyesight, forget that you are anyone, become one with the Vast and the Void. Loosen the heart, free the spirit, be calm as if without a soul. All living things return to their root, return to their root, not knowing why. Constantly in darkness, constantly in darkness, and throughout their physical existence they never depart from this. If they tried to understand this, they would depart from this. Ask not for its name, seek not for its shape. So all life comes to birth through itself.

118/ The one who wants possessions wants to be seen as privileged, the one who has nothing is the real companion of Heaven and Earth.

119/ It is said that in olden times those who ruled everything under Heaven wanted nothing and the world was fulfilled; they practised non-action and the whole of life was transformed; they were immensely deep in their stillness and the many families of the world were calm.

120/ The action of non-action is called Heaven.

The words of non-action are called Virtue.

To love all humanity and to bring success to them is called benevolence.

To unite that which is not united is called greatness.

To go beyond barriers and boundaries is called open-handedness.

To have a vast multitude of diverse things is wealth.

To have and to hold Virtue is called guidance.

To grow in maturity in Virtue is called stability.

To be aligned with the Way is called completion.

To refuse to allow anything external which distracts you is called perfection.

The person who clearly perceives these 10 things will further be magnanimous in their ventures and actions and will benefit all life.

121/ Such a person will leave the gold in the mountains and the pearls to lie in the deep. They do not view money and goods as genuine profit, nor are they attracted by fame and fortune, nor by enjoyment of long life, nor sadness at an early death; they do not value wealth as a blessing, nor are they ashamed by poverty. They will not lust for the wealth of a generation to have as their own; they have no wish to rule the whole world as their private domain. Their honour is clarity of understanding that all life is part of one treasury and that death and birth are united.

122/ Those who have heads and feet but no heart and no ears are numerous. Those who have their bodies but value that which is without body or form are virtually unheard of! Life stops and

starts, is born and and dies, grows and declines and there is nothing which can be done about this. People think the ruler of all this is humanity. Forget that, forget Heaven and be known as one of those who forget self. The person who forgets self can be known as the one who enters Heaven.

123/ Those who hold to the Way are endowed with its Virtue. Being virtuous they are complete in body. Being complete in their bodies, they are complete in spirit. Being complete in spirit, as a result they are in the Way of the sages. They live in the world side by side with the people, travelling with them, but never knowing where they are going. Their simplicity is mind-boggling! The consider accomplishments, gain, machines, talents, to be inappropriate in the affections of the people. People like this do not go where they do not want to go nor do they do what their heart tells them not to do. Even if the whole world sings their praises and acclaims them, they will pay no attention at all; if the whole world blames them and accuses them of losing things, they are calm and unperturbed. Neither the praise nor the blame of the world gives them either gain or loss. Such a one as this is called a person of complete Virtue!

124/ The Virtuous one is still and without thought; when they move it is without design; they keep no tally of right and wrong, good or bad. Virtuous ones share their gain with all and from this they derive pleasure. They share what they have and are content. Mournful, they are like a child who has lost its mother; uncertain, they are like travellers who are lost. Though blessed with great wealth and comforts, they have no idea where it comes from; they have more than enough to eat and drink but have no idea where it comes from. This is the style of Virtuous ones.

125/ There are five ways in which the innate nature is lost. The first is when the five colours confuse the eye and deprive it of clarity of vision. The second is when the five notes confuse the ear and deprive it of the ability to hear. The third is when the five smells affect the nose and cause pains and distress to the forehead. The fourth is when the five flavours deaden the mouth and deprive the sense of taste of its ability to enjoy. The fifth is when pleasures and dislikes unsettle the heart and make the innate nature unstable. These five bring troubles to life.

126/ The sage's heart is stilled! Heaven and Earth are reflected in it, the mirror of all life. Empty, still, calm, plain, quiet, silent, non-active, this is the centredness of Heaven and Earth and of the Way and of Virtue.

127/ Empty, still, calm, plain, quiet, silent, actionless action is the foundation of all life .

128/ If you know the happiness of Heaven, then you know that life is from Heaven and death is the transformation of things. In their stillness they are yin and in their journeying they are yang.

129/ Heaven produces nothing,
yet all life is transformed;
Earth does not support,
Yet all life is sustained;
the Emperor and the King take actionless action,
yet the whole world is served.

130/ This generation believes that the value of the Way is to be found in books. But books are nothing more than words, and words have value but only in terms of their meaning. Meaning is constantly seeking to express what cannot be said in words and thus passed on. This generation values words and puts them into books, yet what it values is perhaps mistaken, because what it values is not really all that valuable. So we look at things and see things, but it is only an outward form and colour, and what can be heard is just the name and sound. How sad that this generation

imagines that the form, colour, name and sound are enough to capture the essence of something! The form, colour, name and sound are in no way sufficient to capture or convey the truth, which is why it is said that the knowledgeable do not speak and those who speak are not knowledgeable. But how can this generation understand this?

131/ Someone who believes wealth is the most important thing cannot give up their income; someone who seeks pre-eminence cannot give up the hunt for fame; those who love power cannot hand it over to others.

132/ To achieve loftiness without the burden of bias; or follow the ways of improvement without benevolence or righteousness; to rule successfully without achievement or fame; who rest without rivers and oceans; long life without organisation; to lose everything and yet to have all; to drift calmly and endlessly, while all good things pay court to them: this is the way of Heaven and Earth, the Virtue of the sages.

133/ The saying goes, "Calm, detachment, silence, quiet, emptiness and actionless action, these are what maintain Heaven and Earth, the Way and Virtue." The saying goes, "The sage rests, truly rests, and is at ease." This manifests itself in their calmness and detachment, so that worries and distress cannot affect them, nothing unpleasant can disturb them, their Virtue is complete and their spirit is not stirred up.

134/ The one who manifests simplicity and purity can genuinely be called the true human being.

135/ When the Way was abandoned and good was substituted, when Virtue was put at risk for the sake of opportunity, then innate nature was abandoned and hearts were allowed to determine their own way. Heart linked with heart through knowledge, but they were unable to give the world peace. Pomp and ceremony were added to this knowledge. This displaced simplicity and the heart was swamped, resulting in the people being confused and disobedient, with no way back to true innate nature nor to their origin.

136/ The ancient ones, wishing to keep themselves alive, did not use elaborate style to express their knowledge. They did not disturb everything in the whole world through their knowledge, nor did they use knowledge to try and disrupt Virtue. Alone and hermit-like they stayed where they were and looked to restore their innate nature. What more could they do than this? The Way has no place for pettiness, and nor has Virtue. Pettiness is dangerous to Virtue; dangerous actions are dangerous to the Way. It is said, rectify yourself and be done. Happiness which is complete is called the Timeliness of Purpose.

137/ It is said, people who lose themselves in their desire for things also lose their innate nature by being vulgar. They are known as people who turn things upside down.

138/ A frog in a well cannot discuss the ocean because it is limited by the size of the well. A summer insect cannot discuss ice because it knows only its own season. A narrow-minded scholar cannot discuss the Way because they are constrained by their own teaching.

139/ Don't cling to your own ideas, for this is contrary to the greatness of the Way.

140/ As to what you should do and not do: just go with the process of change.

141/ Oxen have four feet: this is what is called the Heavenly. When horses are harnessed and oxen have pierced noses, this is called the human way.

142/ The one-legged creature is envious of the millipede; the millipede is envious of the snake; the snake is envious of the wind; the wind is envious of the eye; the eye is envious of the heart.

143/ There is a saying: Heaven and Earth take actionless action yet nothing remains undone.

144/ To feed a bird so it survives, let it live in the midst of the forest, gambol on the shores and inlets, float on the rivers and lakes, devour mudfish and tiddlers, go with the flock, either flying or resting, and be as it wishes. Birds dislike hearing human voices, never mind all the other noises and trouble! If you try to make them happy by playing music in the area around their lakes, they will fly away. If the animals hear it, they will run away and hide, and if the fish hear it they will dive down underwater to escape. Only people, if they hear it, will come together to listen. Fish can live in water quite contentedly, but if people try it they will die, for different beings need different contexts which are right and proper for them. This is why the ancient sages never expected just one response from the rest of the creatures nor tried to make them conform. Titles should not be overstretched in trying to capture reality and ideas should only be applied when appropriate, for this is not only sensible, it will bring good fortune. 145/ All the the multitudes of life arise from the mystery of beginning and return there.

146/ The sage retreats to the serenity of Heaven, as a result nothing causes them harm. Even someone who is out for revenge does not break their opponent's sword. Nor does someone get cross with a tile that just fell on them, no matter how upset they are. Instead, we should recognise that everything under Heaven is united.

147/ Reading the book of Zhuangzi we come to understand the anarchy of nature, the anarchy of the universe, the anarchy of existence. This is an anarchy of letting go and never an anarchy of control. For this reason it is unconcerned with polity, it is even anti-polity, for what does polity matter if everything exists within the anarchic void? Here a manufactured, political anarchy would be just as false as a manufactured capitalism or a manufactured politics of any kind because it would be just as manufactured. What Zhuangzi communicates to us is that anarchy already exists, it always existed; all we need to do is give ourselves up to it and follow its course. This acts as a corrective to the notion that anarchy is a state we create by political action but, says Zhuangzi, that's wrong: that would be just another dream. And we don't need to dream. We don't need to do anything because anarchy was never dependent on us and our self-important ways anyway. We were always in the midst of it and all we need to do is stop cherishing our own opinions to step into its stream. Be like water!

148/ Go with the currents and come out with the flow, never being concerned.

149/ If the heart journeys contentedly, knowledge can forget yes and no. Nothing changes from inside and nothing proceeds from outside if you respond to what occurs in a contented way. By starting with what is contented, not undergoing that which is disturbing, it is possible to know the contentment of forgetting what contentment even is.

150/ Listen! Have you not heard how the perfect human being behaves? They forget their insides and they disregard their eyes and ears. With no defined goal, they meander through the rubbish. What they are good at is doing nothing. Indeed, it is called being but not expecting any reward, bringing up but not controlling.

151/ The Way moves all, but the perfect human being does not stand in its light, their Virtue moves all, but they do not seek fame. They are empty and plain and they seem crazy. Anonymous, abdicating power, they have no interest in work or fame. So they don't criticize others and they in turn are not criticized by them. The perfect human being is never heard so why would you want to be?

152/ When the ties between people are based on profit, then, when troubles come, people part easily. When people are brought together by Heaven, then, when troubles come, they hold together.

153/ Zhuangzi, dressed in a worn patched gown made of coarse cloth and with shoes held together with string, went to visit the king. The king said, "Why are you in such a state?" Zhuangzi replied, "This is poverty but not distress. If a scholar has the Way and the Virtue but is unable to use them, that is distress. If their clothes are worn and shoes held together with string, that is poverty but not distress. 154/ A person was travelling and stopped for the night at an inn. The innkeeper had two daughters, one beautiful and the other ugly. The ugly one was given all consideration but the beautiful one was made to serve. The traveller asked why this was and a young person from the inn replied, "The beautiful one knows she is beautiful and so we don't think of her as beautiful. The ugly one realises she is ugly and therefore we don't think of her as ugly." The traveller went back home and said to all those gathered together, "Remember this! If you act rightly but unselfconsciously you will be universally loved!

155/ The value of your self lies within and it is not affected by what happens externally. The constant transformation of all forms of life is like a beginning without end. What is there in this to disturb your heart? Those who comprehend the Way are free from all this.

156/ The flowing of the stream does nothing, but it follows its nature. The perfect human being does the same with regard to Virtue. They do nothing to cultivate it, but all is affected by its presence. They are like the height of Heaven, natural; or the solidity of the Earth, the brightness of the sun and moon: all natural. There is no need to cultivate this!

157/ Knowledge strolled north to the shores of the Dark Waters and climbed the mount of Secret Heights and came upon Words-of-Actionless-Action. Knowledge said to Words-of-Actionless-Action, "I want to ask you something. What sort of thought and reflection does it take to know the Way? In what sort of place and in what sort of ways should we undertake to rest in the Way? What sort of path and what sort of plans do we need to obtain the Way?" These three questions Knowledge asked Words-of-Actionless-Action but they did not answer. They not only did not answer, they had no idea what to answer.

158/ Those who understand, do not say.
Those who say, do not understand.
And so the sage follows the teaching without words.
The Way cannot be made to occur,
Virtue cannot be sought after.
However, benevolence can be undertaken,
Righteousness can be striven for,
Rituals can be adhered to.
it is said, "When the Way was lost, Virtue appeared;
When Virtue was lost, benevolence appeared;
When benevolence was lost, righteousness appeared;
When righteousness was lost, ritual appeared.
Rituals are just the frills on the hem of the Way, and are signs of impending disorder.

159/ It is said that one who follows the Way daily does less and less. As they do less and less, they eventually arrive at actionless action. Having achieved actionless action, there is nothing which is not done.

160/ Let me talk to you about life and death. Life follows death and death is the forerunner of life. Who can know their ways? Human life begins with the original breath; when it comes together there is life, when it is dispersed there is death. Death and life are this together so which should be termed bad? All the forms of life are one yet some we regard as beautiful and

others we call ugly. These may be known as the spiritual and the wonderful or as the diseased and the rotting. Yet the diseased and the rotting can become the spiritual and the wonderful and the spiritual and wonderful can become the diseased and rotting. It is said that all that is under Heaven is one breath: ponder these things!

161/ When you know nothing then you are close to words of actionless action.

162/ Heaven and Earth have great beauty but no words. The four seasons follow their regular path but do not debate it. All forms of life have their own distinct natures but do not discuss them. The sage looks at the beauties of Heaven and Earth and comprehends the principle behind all life. So the perfect human being does without doing and the great sage initiates nothing, for, as we say, they have glimpsed Heaven and Earth.

163/ A wise person was asked, "Is it possible to obtain the Way and have it as mine?" The wise person replied, "As you aren't even in control of your own body, how could you hope to obtain and hold onto the Way? The questioner then said, "If I don't control my own body, then who does?" The wise person replied, "Your shape is given you by Heaven and Earth. Life is not yours to have, it is the combining harmony of Heaven and Earth. Your innate nature and destiny are not yours to have, they are constructs given you by Heaven and Earth. You should walk, therefore, as if you don't know where you are going; remain where you are without knowing why; eat without knowing what your tasting. All this arises from the yang breath of Heaven and Earth. How can it then be possible for you to obtain and hold anything?"

164/ You should not look for the Way in anything specific. There is nothing without it. The perfect way is like this — so it is called the Great. Complete, all-embracing, universal: three different words but with the same reality, all referring back to the One. Imagine that we were wandering in the place of No-Place. Harmony and unity would be our themes, never-ending, never failing! Join with me in actionless action! In simplicity and quietude! In disinterest and purity! In harmony and ease! My intentions are now aimless. I go nowhere and have no idea how I got there; I go and I come and I don't know why. I have been, I have gone. I have no idea when my journey is over. I wander and rest in limitless vastness. Great knowledge comes in and I have no idea where it will all end.

165/ To talk of the Way is not to know the Way.

166/ Not to know is profound and to know is shallow. To be without knowledge is to be inward and to know it's to be outward.

167/ Not to know is to know and to know is to not know.

168/ The Way cannot be heard: what is heard is not the Way. The Way cannot be seen: what can be seen is not the Way. The Way cannot be spoken: what is spoken is not the Way. Do we know what form gives form to the formless? The Way has no name. 169/ To be questioned about the Way and to give an answer means that you don't know the Way. To ask about the Way means you have never understood anything about the Way.

170/ To note the changes all around but not to change oneself is not to change.

171/ Perfect speech is no speech; perfect action is no action. To know only what is known is a tragedy.

172/ Do nothing; Know nothing; Think nothing; Care about nothing: what kind of philosophy is this? The philosophy of letting go: the philosophy of the Way. Is this not anarchy? Perhaps its too anarchic for your taste? Yet what kind of anarchy would it be that asked for permission and was careful to exist in accordance with your pre-programmed parameters? Anarchy never asked you for your opinion, the Way does not consult before going about its business, neither is it

concerned with where and how it goes. This is its compassion for in its lack of intention, and having no destination, it wishes no harm at all. Being unconcerned, it can provide everything that is needed. Not knowing, there can be no fault. This is hard for a human being to grasp, concerned, as they are, with grasping. For the Way will not be grasped just as one cannot hold a river in one's hands. Anarchy is not made, it is surrendered to in peace and confidence.

173/ What profit can we show for all our toil, toiling under the sun? What are we? Shepherds of the wind! What a monumental misunderstanding! To will a dream because at least the dreamer is dreaming! 174/ Imagine a universe. Imagine for a moment that the ideas "anarchy" and "harmony" are not in any way opposed. Imagine that the ideas "chaos" and "order" are not in any way opposed. Imagine that having no purpose, goal or direction is not opposed to the fact that some things that exist can have such things. Designate this "the natural way". Now ask yourself what it means and if it tells you anything about yourself. Would it mean that there was a right and wrong? Would it mean there was a do and don't? In space, which way is up? Which way is left? Which way is right? If an asteroid comes along and crashes into a planet, ruining the life chances there, is that a matter of concern? In such a universe, where time is measured in billions of years and life may come and go in the same place multiple times over, what is the significance of one life? In this universe, what is the significance of life at all? We might want to call it important — but why is it important in a place where no goal or purpose or direction is the ordered chaos or the chaotic order of things, where everything that happens, regardless of what it is, creates its own, naturally evolving harmony, a harmony not to be distinguished from the purest, most natural of anarchies?

175/ An ability is not a necessity; a "can" is not a "should". This is the issue for the moralists of the Earth, the ones who tell us that morality exists [they are dreaming it so we can hardly blame them for thinking it seems real] and that there is an obligation upon us to obey it. Often, their rhetorical tactic is to argue that because we can distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong, then we should and, what's more, we should do it habitually. In fact, so habitually should we do this that, in effect, it becomes a system, the condition of our existence. We have now actively moralised ourselves by such behaviour. But stop and think: why for a single second should it mean that because we can order ourselves then we should order ourselves, particularly when this kind of order is deliberately to be distinguished from chaos? Why should we imagine for a single second that because we can designate right and wrong that it thereby is right and wrong? Why are we imagining that the ways we designate and the things which find favour are the right things done in the right ways? What is this right? Have we not decided that because the human being can measure then the human being should measure and, what is more, that the human being's measurements will be, in some sense, absolute laws of right and wrong whether they are or not? But there is a problem. If there is any kind of building or manufacturing in a sea of anarchy then that building is a manufactured, imposed system of morality. But it is unnecessary and artificial. Anarchy is itself a morality and a morality all of it without intention, without purpose, without goal, without destination, without wanting to make people into certain things or to have them follow certain ways. The morality of anarchy is the morality of water which flows over the ground, cutting its own channel where it may, rolling where it may, as nature dictates by actionless action, purposeless purpose and intentionless intention. Downward it goes, not caring how or where, towards the sea. This is the morality of anarchy, the morality of going where you can, however you can, overcoming whatever obstacles are in the way with a slow, unconcerned, patience, without purpose, without motive, without desire. The water that rolls from the top

of the mountain heading towards the sea does not care over which ground it goes or in which direction it goes before it finally arrives where it turns out it was going, a place it never set out to go to in the first place. It does not even know it was going anywhere. The morality of anarchy is exactly the same. It is innocent, naive, not-knowing. The morality of anarchy does not calculate right and wrong, it does not balance this against that or go this way and not that, for it does not calculate at all.

176/ Inside and outside. Fame and humility. Someone who focuses on the internal is not interested in fame. Someone who focuses on the external is intent on gaining whatever they can. The one who does things which bring no glory shines brightly in all they do. One who looks to make gains at any cost is just a trader. They are just standing on tiptoe but they think they are above all others. Someone who struggles to succeed gets worn out while someone who doesn't really mind can't be possessed by such forces.

177/ Here is a mystery: there is something which exists though it emerges from no roots, it returns through no opening. It exists but has no place; it survives yet has no beginning nor end. Though it emerges through no opening, something tells us it is real. It is real but it has no permanent place: this tells us it is a dimension of space. It survives but has no beginning and no end: this tells us that it has dimensions of time. It is born, it dies, it emerges, it returns, though in its emergence and return there is no form to be seen. This heavenly gate is non-existence, and all forms of life emerge from non-existence. That which exists cannot cause things to exist. They all arise from non-existence. This is the hidden knowledge of the sages.

178/ Perfect behaviour does not discriminate amongst people;
Perfect righteousness takes no account of things;
Perfect knowledge makes no plans;
Perfect benevolence exhibits no emotion;
Perfect faith makes no oath of sincerity.

179/ The way to anarchy.
Suppress the whims of the will and untie mistakes of the heart.
Expunge the knots of Virtue, unblock the flow of the Way.

Honours and wealth,
distinctions and authority,
fame and gain,
these six are formed by the illusions of the will.

Looks and style,
beauty and reason,
thrill of life and memories,
these six are the faults of the heart.

Hatred and desire,
joy and anger,
sadness and happiness,
these six are the knots of Virtue.

Rejection and acceptance,
giving and taking,
knowledge and ability,
these six are the impediments to the free flow of the Way.

When these four sets of six no longer trouble the breast,
then you will be centred.
Being centred, you will be calm.
Being calm, you will be enlightened.
Being enlightened, you will be empty.
Being empty, you will be in actionless action,
but with actionless action nothing remains undone.

180/ No matter how high you get, you should never consider yourself better. No matter how low you get, you should never consider yourself useless.

181/ In your grace you may plan to act benevolently and righteously, but the result is always the same hypocrisy!

182/ The best thing to do is nothing, except develop true sincerity and be able to respond without difficulty to the true nature of Heaven and Earth.

183/ The dog is not thought special just because it can bark, and no human being is thought special just because they can speak. Even less are they thought great. Anyone who thinks they are great is not to be counted as such nor as virtuous. Nothing is greater than Heaven and Earth, but they do not seek greatness. One who knows what it is to be great does not go looking for it, does not lose it nor reject it and neither do they change their opinions in order to be great. They turn inward and find what is without end. This is the sincerity of the great human being.

184/ Allowing one person to determine what the world needs through their own powers it's like trying to comprehend everything in one moment. 185/ The spiritual human being dislikes people crowding around them. If they insist on coming, they are argued with, and from this argument comes nothing of benefit to anyone. Therefore, such a person ensures they have no attachment to anything, and nothing from which they are separated. Holding fast to virtue and dwelling in harmony, they follow the world. This is what is known as the true human being. Such people leave knowledge for the ants, follow the style of fish, and abandon the ideas of sheep.

186/ The true human being of the past waited upon Heaven when dealing with people and did not wait upon people when dealing with Heaven.

187/ Heaven is in everything: if you follow it, your understanding will be like not understanding and your wisdom will be like not being wise. By not being wise you will become wise later. When you ask questions, set no limits, even though they cannot be limitless. There is a reality: the same today as in the past. It does not change for nothing can affect it: its nature is changeless change. Could we not say this is one great harmony?

188/ People respect what they understand as knowledge, but they do not understand what their knowledge doesn't understand — and so gain understanding. So isn't this simply great confusion? Well well! There is no way out of that. This comes from saying definitely this, definitely that, doesn't it?

189/ Without discrimination. The heart of the Way is in lack of discrimination. The forms of life are different, but the Way does not discriminate. Not discriminating, it is also actionless action. Life occurs, the four seasons begin and end, the generations follow one after another, species change and transform, good and bad fortune occurs. It is like a great marshland with space for hundreds of kinds of trees. Or like a great mountain where the trees and grasses rest on the same ground. 190/ Fish seem not to fear nets, they only seem to fear pelicans. Rid yourself of petty knowledge and allow great wisdom to enlighten you. Rid yourself of goodness, and

goodness will naturally arise. When a child is born, it needs no great teacher; nevertheless it learns to talk as it lives with those who talk.

191/ Only the perfect human being is able to be in the world and not become partisan, can follow others and not get lost. They do not absorb their teachings, they just listen and understand without any commitment.

192/ Quietude and silence are healing for those who are ill; massage is beneficial to the old; peaceful contemplation can calm someone with distress. But these are only for the disturbed person. Someone who is at ease and is untroubled by these things is inhabited by peace and has no need for any of them. And so it is that the person in tune with the Way does not ask or enquire how things occur for they are inhabited by this peace, the untroubled peace of anarchy.

193/ Words are used to express concepts, but once you have grasped the concepts, the words are forgotten. I would like to find someone who has forgotten the words so I could debate with such a person!

194/ Words say nothing, so you can talk all your life and say nothing. In contrast, you can live your life without speaking and have said things of worth.

195/ There is that which makes things acceptable and that which makes things unacceptable. There is that which makes things certain and that which makes things uncertain. How is this? Because it is. How is this not so? It is not so, because it is not so. How does this occur? Because it occurs. How does this not occur? It does not occur, because it does not occur.

196/ All forms of life arise from the same base and in their diverse forms they succeed each other. They begin and end like an unbroken circle, and none can say why. This is the influence of Heaven. This influence of heaven is the harmony of Heaven.

197/ The leaders of this generation are like those who throw away their lives in pursuit of material gain. Isn't it pathetic! They are like a man who took a very highly prized pearl and shot at birds in the sky with it. The people laughed at it when they saw it. Why? Because they saw someone using something of great value to obtain something of little value. Now surely life is even more valuable than a pearl?

198/ One who knows they are contented will not get mixed up in the pursuit of gain; one who truly understands what is good will not be worried by any loss; one who knows themselves inwardly will not be worried by the lack of external status.

199/ Value life. if you value life then you will put profit into perspective.

200/ Make no haste to become wealthy; take no risks for fame; you will lose the heavenly within. The Way does not wend its uninterested way looking for fame and wealth; and yet fame and wealth are produced nevertheless.

201/ "Peaceful contentment is happiness," said Knowing Harmony. To wear out your mind and destroy your body in searching for these things — surely this is simply a terrible delusion!

202/ A parable. There was once a man who was frightened by his own shadow and scared of his own footprints, so he tried to escape them by running away. But every time he lifted his foot and brought it down, he made more footprints, and no matter how fast he ran, his shadow never left him. Thinking he was running too slowly, he ran faster, never ceasing, until, finally, he exhausted himself and collapsed and died. He had no idea that by simply sitting in the shade he would have lost his shadow, nor that by resting quietly he would cease making footprints. He really was a great fool!

203/ The wise human being models themselves on Heaven and does not kowtow to convention. The fool does the opposite. They cannot take their model from Heaven and so they are

swayed by the mundane. They simply do not know the value of truth, but are under the domination of ordinary people and so are affected by this common crowd and are never at peace.

204/ Swap the petty for the serious. Exchange the external for the inward. Follow the way of actionless action.

205/ What is true rest? The wise person rests where there is truly rest and does not rest when there is no real rest. The bulk of humanity rests when there is no real rest and does not know how to truly rest.

206/ Do not confuse the necessary with the unnecessary. Doing so can only lead to war. War always leads to somebody's destruction.

207/ The comprehension of the petty person does not go beyond the external wrapping, the ephemera of gifts, business cards and letterheads. They exhaust their spirit on that which is insignificant and vacuous. Someone like this will most certainly get lost in time and space. They will be trapped in things and they will never know the great beginning. The perfect human being, in contrast, concentrates their spirit upon that which was before the beginning and rests in the strangeness of being in the fields of nothingness. Like water, they flow without form or flow out into the great purity. How pathetic you are! Those of you who do not understand any greater than the tip of one of the hairs on your head cannot comprehend the great peacefulness !

208/ Trying to use what is unequal to produce equality is to be equally unequal. Trying to prove something certain by something uncertain is only certain to make things uncertain. That there is a difference between what we see with our eyes and what we know with our spirit is a wisdom from long ago. But the fool relies upon their eyes and loses themselves in what is merely human , and everything they do is just a facade. This is a great sadness!

209/ The one not cut off from the primal origin is known as the heavenly person. The one not cut off from the true nature is known as the spiritual human being. Someone who is not cut off from the truth is known as the perfect human being. Someone who views Heaven as the primal source, Virtue as the root, and the Way as a gate, and sees change and transformation as natural, such a one we call a sage.

210/ This should be the purpose of the heart: not to be trapped by convention, nor to be concerned with adornments; not to be thoughtless in treating others, nor to be in opposition to the crowd; to want the whole world to live in peace and balance for the sake of the people's unity, to look to the needs of others as well as yourself.

211/ This was the way of the ancient one who followed the Way: public-spirited and completely non-partisan, flexible and not fixed upon one idea, open-minded and without a guide, following others without a second thought, not casting anxious glances, not using knowledge to make plots, not choosing one thing rather than another, instead going with all: this was the way of the ancient one who followed the Way.

212/ Those who are without knowledge are free of the entrapments that arise from working with knowledge. I would like to be one without knowledge, not trapped in the teachings of any "wise" human beings.

213/ To consider the origin as pure and that which emerges as course; to view accumulation as inadequate; to live by oneself in peace and with spiritual clarity: this is what in ancient times was known as the way of the Tao. And so the wise of old founded their system on the belief that nothing exists forever, and they were guided in this by the notion of the great one. Gentleness and weakness combined with humility and self-emptying were it's distinguishing features and it's core was the prevention of harm to all forms of life.

214/ A wise person once said that one who does not exist in self sees others as they really are. Their movements are like water, their calmness is like a mirror, their response is like that of an echo. When they are empty, they seem to have forgotten; unmoving, they are as still as water; peaceful, they are as one with all; they watch success and failure, and they never try to take the lead but always follow.

215/ Know the masculine but hold to the feminine and become the valley of the whole world. Know your purity but hold to the impure, be a channel for the whole world. Most people choose to be first but the anarchic human being of the Way chooses to be last and says that they will accept the dregs of the whole world. Most people choose fulfillment; but they choose to be empty. They have never hoarded, so have more than enough; they prefer to be alone, yet they have many around them. Living by actionless action, they mock at ability. When others look for good fortune, they feel free to bend and twist. They say only that they wish to avoid blame. They consider what is most profound to be the core and take what is most severe as their guide, and they say that which is strong will break and that which is sharp will become blunt. They are always open-handed and tolerant with all and seek no harm to anyone. This can be called perfection.

216/ The blank and motionless have no form; change and transformation are never at rest; what is death? what is life? what is the companionship of Heaven and Earth? where does the spirit of clarity go? when forgotten, what becomes of it?

217/ Call it "anarchy", call it "the Tao", or call it "the Way", you cannot strive to achieve this. By effort and action you cannot come into accord with it. Anarchy is not deliberation, Tao is not construction, the Way is not manufactured. In doing, you do not do, in not doing, you do. In the anarchy of the Way you are disarmed and you learn the wisdom and compassion of actionless-action. Anarchy already is; the Way is already all around you; before you and after you it goes; there is nowhere it does not go. It was not made and could not be unmade. It is the nothing from which something comes, the nothing in which all things cohere. It is anarchy. This is all there is. Nothing that makes and unmakes something is all there is. Changeless change is all there is. Who needs to make anarchy anymore? Who needs to strive anymore? Who needs a goal or a direction anymore? Who needs a purpose or intention anymore? What is desire anymore? What is right and wrong anymore? What is truth or knowledge anymore? What is an interpretation anymore? WHAT ARE YOU AND ME ANYMORE?

THERE IS NOTHING TO STICK TO.

Heraclitus

Heraclitus was a native of Ephesus, the modern day Western Turkish city of Efes, and was a pre-Socratic Ionian Greek philosopher who lived between roughly 535–475 BCE. Even in the centuries BCE amongst other Greek philosophers he was known as “The Obscure” and modern day philosophical and scientific thought has often not been able to label him any more adequately. Partly, this is because these disciplines have wanted to find a shelf they could stick him on when he has seemingly not wanted to be so denominated. It is a notable feature of Western discourse that the culturally dominant narrative it has built up has then sought [presumed] to denominate everything in relation to its imagined dominance [which it bases on the hubristic belief it is “right”.] Heraclitus, however, is first and foremost a man with his own mind and he goes his own way. A self-taught thinker, he apparently came from a wealthy family but eschewed this to pursue the lonely life of a philosopher, a decision which has led some to see him as a misanthrope or an anti-intellectual. As you will see in the fragments below, which are a number of the roughly 125 fragments which are all that remain of his writings, Heraclitus has a quite distinct philosophy of movement and change, one that bears comparison with the Daoist thinking of Laozi and Zhuangzi. Many Western commentators have sought to comment upon the thought of Heraclitus by a means of measurement which judged it by subsequent Western thinking but here, without at all attempting to give an overview of Heraclitean thought, I will comment on these fragments in ways more compatible with the more Eastern thinking already evident in the *There is Nothing to Stick to* project. Those who want to study these fragments of Heraclitus in more detail [and more completely] will find that an Internet search easily yields many further resources to do exactly that. I have decided not to number the fragments myself but if one consults the standard academic works one will find that they are numbered. I start with the first fragment going by the academic numbering system but thereafter wander as I will.

Some Heraclitus Fragments with Commentary

“Although this Logos is eternally valid, yet human beings are unable to understand it – not only before hearing it, but even after they have heard it for the first time. That is to say, although all things come to pass in accordance with this Logos, human beings seem to be quite without any experience of it – at least if they are judged in the light of such words and deeds as I am here setting forth according to its nature, and to specify how it behaves. Other human beings, on the contrary, are as unaware of what they do when awake as they are when asleep.”

The first thought that occurs here is to strip out the word “Logos”, a Greek concept which can variously be translated as word, meaning, account or pattern, and by which Heraclitus means the reason, account, pattern or perhaps even way of the universe, and substitute the word Tao. For example, as in Tao Te Ching 1:

“The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The nameless is the beginning of heaven and earth. The named is

the mother of the ten thousand things [i.e. everything]. Ever desireless, one can see the mystery. Ever desiring, one sees the manifestations. These two spring from the same source but differ in name; this appears as darkness. Darkness within darkness. The gateway to all mystery.”

In both cases here, whether Logos or Tao, what we have is a mystery. Human beings are unable to grasp either Logos or Tao, it is simply beyond them. These things have their own character manifested throughout created things yet their reason or principle is both evident yet also indiscernible for such created things as ourselves. They are, respectively, the context for us but we are not the context for them – as egotistical human thought often imagines. They are the eternal, we the conditioned and temporal.

Another thing to note in this first fragment is Heraclitus’ use of the awake/asleep dyad. It is one of his favourites and bears much pondering.

“We should let ourselves be guided by what is common to all. Yet, although the Logos is common to all, most human beings live as if each of them had a private intelligence of their own.”

The first sentence here is more profound than it perhaps first appears and is expounded upon in the subsequent sentence. “Private intelligence” is all well and good but, in the end, don’t we all live in the same universe of experience? Doesn’t this mandate a recognition of our common existence? Again Logos compared and contrasted with the concept of Tao is instructive for in Taoism everyone is subject to the eternal Tao of the universe even as Heraclitus argues for the Logos which is common to all [i.e. everything] here. This is a very profound expression of a holism: all are one. So it is not that we all have a private intelligence of our own: we are part of something greater that we cannot comprehend. This is what gives us everything we are, briefly, for a moment, before we must inevitably give it all back. In the end this is a Heraclitean expression of Taoist “actionless action” for what else is “let[ting] ourselves be guided by what is common to all” [i.e. Tao/Logos]?

“Let us not make arbitrary conjectures about the greatest matters.”

The drive or desire to create canonical narratives or indisputable, timeless formulae has been a constant companion of human thinking. We see it equally in human religion and in science, as well as many other areas, and we do so because it is a matter of a certain kind of human mentality, one which values being over becoming, stasis over movement, the same over different and constancy over change. Yet, as will be seen in several of these fragments, Heraclitus was more for movement or change than stasis or being. He saw this as nature’s manner of operation. And so we need to remember that ideas are deceptive, seductive and fictive. Yet what they are not is reality reconstituted in thought. By turning reality into congealed thoughts we do not capture it: we falsify it. As Heraclitus puts it, we make “arbitrary conjectures” and it does not help us to do so.

“Much learning does not teach understanding, otherwise it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, Xenophanes and Hecataeus.”

Heraclitus had his pet hates and a number of them were highly thought of thinkers of the time. Its no different today, of course, as many petty academic squabbles go on all the time where one thinker disparages another. The more important aspect of this fragment, however, is the notion that much learning does not automatically lead to “understanding”, understanding being a rather fuzzy concept anyway. For, ask yourself, what constitutes understanding? The repeating of a culturally dominant interpretation of something or the recitation of a popular belief? Surely this is not enough? When you get right down to it you need to ask yourself how understanding something could be demonstrated in the first place. It is not merely a matter of learning the thoughts of certain others, even if they are relatively famous. And then you have to consider this statement as an absolute: is understanding possible at all or is all understanding little other than mere presumption?

“It pertains to all human beings to know themselves and to be temperate.”

“To be temperate is the greatest virtue. Wisdom consists in speaking and acting the truth, giving heed to the nature of things.”

I take these two fragments together due to their shared context of what they call being “temperate”. This is a characteristic of mind and, once more, bears comparison with Eastern thinking where “peace of mind” which rises in estimation to become “enlightenment” is highly prized. The Greek term behind this is “sophrosyne”, a term which denotes “safe mind”, temperance, balance, decorum, prudence and self-control. It is that mind which is not beset by passions and desires which pull it this way and that and so compares well with Taoist and Zen thoughts about the ideal mind which is unperturbed by desire. Understood in this way, we might call it balance. Heraclitus calls this kind of mind “the greatest virtue” where Greeks thought of virtue as “excellence in being a human being”.

But look at what is recommended here by Heraclitus in terms of being the best human being one can be: knowing yourself [a widespread belief of many minds in the ancient world generally], the temperate, balanced mind that is sophrosyne, and “speaking and acting the truth, giving heed to the nature of things”. This latter is imagined to be “wisdom” and the “giving heed to the nature of things” is far from unimportant in the Heraclitean mindset. Heraclitus, like the leading Taoists I have often referred to, highly favours nature in its manner of operation. This is perceived of more as an action than as a narrative or set of propositions. In fact, we might say it is action since most often he characterises it as movement and change. Heraclitus is a philosopher of motion and of nature as motion.

“One should not act or speak as if he were asleep.”

“The waking have one world in common.”

These fragments are reiterations of previous thoughts in which a private world of sleep and dreams is contrasted with a waking world we hold in common. The idea appears to be that this latter world is not, or should not be, merely a matter of our own, private imaginations and much less our own personal partisanship. [Here we might note that the world is in common but humans have proceeded to partition and dissect it artificially.] Note that this is not the first time that Heraclitus puts acting on equal par with speaking or thinking. This focus on acting or doing remains constant throughout.

“Death is what we see when awake, when we are asleep it is dreams.”

Fragments like this earn Heraclitus his depressive, misanthropic reputation. To me, however, this seems nothing other than clear-eyed realism. Waking life, as an observed phenomenon, is nothing other than gradual decay which leads to death. Being asleep, we dream unconsciously. One only wonders why other commentators think we need to be either optimistic or pessimistic about any of this.

“The lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks nor conceals, but gives signs.”

The famous oracle at Delphi was an oracle of Apollo, brother of Athena and son of Zeus. Heraclitus has much to say about religions and human rituals concerning such things, often of a disparaging nature because he does not see what they achieve nor does he recognise their importance. In this case he does not see the oracle as a source of authoritative speech nor of holy concealment of truth but as a giver of signs, better interpretations. Which is exactly what they do. But what are interpretations? Puzzles? Metaphors? Clues?

“Unless you expect the unexpected you will never find truth, for it is hard to discover and hard to attain.”

Heraclitus’ point here is that there is no reason to expect that truth is what is to be expected. Heraclitus considers truth something hard to realise. So this fragment is against truth as easy or conventional, as transparent or obvious.

“They do not step into the same rivers. It is other and still other waters that are flowing.”

“You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others go ever flowing on. They go forward and back again.” “Into the same rivers we step and do not step. We exist and we do not exist.”

These are the fragments for which Heraclitus is perhaps most famous, his observations about rivers, their movement and their changing nature. But these fragments are not saying the same thing or addressing the same point. The first fragment is to point out that the river is not a static thing. It is change and it is movement. That is its nature. It is not, is never, the same river in its make up. It is always other water which takes the place of yet other water. A river is something which flows. The second fragment emphasises this again but adds that the waters go forward and back again. This hints at the circular process by which rains produce rivers which in turn produce seas from whence comes rain, etc. Once more, movement and change, this time more expressly as process, is made explicit. With the third fragment the emphasis is changed, however. This time the focus is on the person doing the stepping for, says Heraclitus, they are not, are never, the same either ! When he says that “we exist and we do not exist” he is questioning the notion of a fixed self, something Taoism and Zen Buddhism state openly is a fiction. Heraclitus in his third fragment, sees the sense in this idea, questioning the idea of self in the process. Across all three fragments, however, change, flow and movement are emphasised. This is nature’s way.

“Cool things become warm, the warm grows cool, the moist dries, the parched becomes moist.”

Mainstream science has laws for observations like this. Heraclitus is keen to note the movement involved. Stasis is most unnatural because things change. “It is in changing that things find repose.”

Here Heraclitus boldly states this thesis. Things stay the same only in that they are constantly changing. It is a stasis of change, a philosophy of motion.

“Time is a child moving counters in a game; the royal power is a child’s.”

Heraclitus here furnishes us with a metaphor, the young child randomly moving counters in a game, not understanding why or even understanding the game. It is just random movement of pieces. Heraclitus feels that this random motion is the “royal power” that exists in time. Random-

ization is that which rules over all and this comes to be, once again, a profound interpretation not at all far removed from the notion of Tao elsewhere.

“It should be understood that war is the common condition, that strife is justice, and that all things come to pass through the compulsion of strife.”

“Homer was wrong in saying, ‘Would that strife might perish from amongst gods and human beings’. For if that were to occur, then all things would cease to exist.”

The two fragments above utter sentiments that we might not want to hear. Heraclitus is arguing, much as Nietzsche would later do, for the necessity of strife for the furtherance of things, for strife and antagonism as the essential motors of change. Heraclitus is not then saying we must find people to fight with for, as you can see, he argues that strife is “the common condition” — something which means he regards it as naturally and continually occurring. Hence, to wish for some peaceful utopia where there is never any strife is doubly blind for no such place exists and, if it did, it would rob us of exactly that which constitutes human continuance. Compare Nietzsche’s “That which does not kill us makes us stronger” which comes from a similar place. Nietzsche, of course, also argued that life, which is will to power, seeks things to overcome which themselves then give a feeling of strength. Either way, and from slightly different places, both see strife and antagonism as necessary things for life to exist. Since they are part of nature’s furniture anyway, neither seem at all morally perturbed by this either. One might as well be morally perturbed by getting wet in a rain storm or getting burnt by the sun.

“There is exchange of all things for fire and of fire for all things, as there is of wares for gold and of gold for wares.”

Some insist that Heraclitus thinks all things are literally made of fire but I am not one of these. Fire we may see as his metaphorical [and quite understandable] way of referring to energy. This latter way has the benefit of making more sense [although we should beware of making sense, something which is making a human narrative out of our thinking!] and of making him consistent with his insistence that there is a Logos behind all things. Now he is talking about what moderns would refer to as a law of conservation of energy, the belief that energy can neither be created nor destroyed but is constant, if with the ability to transform from one kind of energy to another. In his own terms, Heraclitus is explaining his physical understanding of the change and movement he sees everywhere.

“This universe, which is the same for all, has not been made by any god or human being, but it always has been, is, and will be an ever-living fire, kindling itself by regular measures and going out by regular measures.”

In this fragment Heraclitus postulates that there never was a beginning — for the universe has simply always existed. It raises in moderns, who imagine a “Big Bang” as the essential, physical beginning, the question: what was before the beginning? But this is not a question Heraclitus needs to answer for he does not conceive it was ever made and he thinks the energy it contains was always there, although not necessarily in the same form. He thinks of it as fire which bursts out here one day and cools to embers the next — but always with the potential to burst out again one day should the circumstances arise. Its worth noting here that “beginning” and “end” are human words: the universe is under no obligation to exist in accordance with such things or under the limitations of such processes. Indeed, one wonders why we puny creatures should imagine to understand something so eternal at all. One can understand why Heraclitus can see it as something which simply rolls on, as it always has done, and which always will do.

“The fairest universe is but a heap of rubbish piled up at random.”

I enjoy this fragment as a rebuff to all those cultured denizens of modern society who are accustomed to looking at natural phenomena and cooing sycophantically as if such things were special or unsullied by those things in life which they dislike, things which are usually human opinions or actions. The problem is that all these people, usually so refined in their own eyes, are essentially cooing at garbage, a random collection of natural phenomena which have just, at random and without purpose or intention, come to be the way they are. This is not art or beauty anymore than the random clutter in Tracey Emin's bedroom was art or beauty. This is the "when nothing is done nothing is left undone" of Taoism looked at from a pre-Socratic Greek mind. That we often call this beautiful is enigmatic and probably something to do with its innocence in that we cannot pin its existence on anyone like we can with something someone created. And yet ... is not everything essentially the result of random concatenations of events, of cosmic rubbish piled up and existing as it can? Beauty, then, comes to be about more than a naive appreciation of how something looks. It is another human discourse involving what can look beautiful and our reasons for thinking something beautiful at all. In Heraclitus' fragment something can be both "rubbish" and "the fairest" and, most notable of all, occurring at random. It was not created.

"Every beast is driven to pasture by a blow."

Here is a simple statement of a general rule: outside forces constantly shape us, pushing us one way or another as things to which we must react. No standing still.

"It is hard to fight against impulsive desire. Whatever it wants it will buy at the cost of the soul."

Here is a comment on that most contradictory and inexplicable of creatures, the human being. In this fragment is there a nod in acknowledgement that these creatures will sell themselves out in a heartbeat to the overpowering impulse they cannot control, consequences be damned? Is Heraclitus suggesting such things should be fought against? In this fragment I cannot help but see human beings as creatures that are doomed to be reckless and certainly far from the "rational" and reasonable creatures some imagine them to be.

"It would not be better if things happened to human beings just as they wish."

Heraclitus the Taoist is back in this fragment with his comment that, human intentions being prosecutable, things would not be any better. In fact, one can easily imagine they would be worse. It is a blessing that human beings are so limited in the things they can achieve. Everything we actually need to live is already provided to us by the actionless action of the universe. This, in fact, is why we exist at all – and quite at random! Even Jesus of Nazareth, in one of his speeches, noted that nature provides food and clothing for all things so these are not things that we should worry about. Cynics thought the same. Instead, the danger here is in getting what you wish for, bearing in mind the previous fragment in which impulsive, desirous human beings are ready to sell their souls. Look around to see it repeated again and again. It reminds me of something John Cage often wrote in his books ... "you will only make things worse." This is a key point and one which separates political anarchists from my kind of spiritual, philosophical anarchist: the former wants to get what they want and thinks they know best; the latter wants to extinguish wants and live simply. The warning is clear: do not think that you know better. Why do you think that you know at all? There is also something of a mystery here too that is rolled up with the human enjoyment of things that happen at random or by accident and which they do not control, the so-called "happy accident". In it, we sense that being in control is not all its often cracked up to be.

"A foolish person is a-flutter at every word."

I see in this fragment the notion that people in general are far too bewitched by words, things which sometimes have a magical or triggering effect upon us. Perhaps this is due to my immersion in the contemporary inventions of social media and rolling news where sensation after sensation and outrage after outrage must be generated to get their 2 minutes as the focus of people's attention. Also on social media I notice people who seem to surf this continually generated content all day, having opinions about all of it. This is the ultimate in dumbing down in which mere comment or unreflective opinion is now enough in order to be heard. Often today we see written news stories which are little more than concatenations of tweets. This is how partisanship and nefarious rhetoricisms are created and fostered. Of course, it's all trash and almost entirely worthless. Less than three decades ago none of this happened. Although many now would justify it as essential [with a mixture of disreputable motives for saying so], it isn't at all. I would even argue we were much better off without it. What Heraclitus is getting at, of course, is the need for discretion. Not every word is worthy of attention and, as we generate more and more of them, less and less is due any attention at all. If we remember back a couple of pages to the word *sophrosyne*, a balanced, temperate mind, we will see how that character of mind contrasts with this one. We should not be paying the constant output of the world attention. It is not wise. We should have due discretion and learn what to value and what to ignore. This is how we achieve a temperate balanced mind. It is not by following the trail of outrage and 24 hour comment. "He said: Bigotry is the sacred disease, and self-conceit tells lies."

Bigotry and self-conceit are often evident in the constant words human beings produce and publish. But they are not positive attributes according to Heraclitus. Diseases, of course, are organic and treatable as such which suggests that bigotry is not something unavoidable but that it can be dealt with as any other disease, with the appropriate treatment or even by cutting it out. Here the second part of the sentence is instructive when Heraclitus notes that paying too much attention to your own conceits "tells lies". And this is true. If you follow your own thinking too much, raise it to some unquestioned level above the common fray of the world and put it on a pedestal, it will only end up lying to you and misleading you. Truth is never the unique possession of one mind but is always encouraged and fostered by the interactions of others. Relationship and interaction with others are therefore key elements in treating both bigotry and self-conceit. Something is not made sacred simply because you think it. You should also pay heed to your own mistakes and fallibilities.

"Most people do not take heed of the things they find, nor do they grasp them even when they have learned about them, although they think they do."

Heraclitus repeats this thought a couple of times but, on this occasion, adds the part about people thinking they understand things they don't understand. Yet this is a conundrum: how does one know when or if one understands? It begs the question of how much of human knowledge, so-called, is presumption or the acting out of having knowledge that is not, in fact, possessed. Many of my sources in this project are those who would criticise the convention of knowledge or of possessing understanding. Yet here Heraclitus is arguing that the mass of people are not even paying attention to this. There is reason, then, to ask what we really know or understand at all as well as asking after the role and purpose of such things. In other sources I have used it has been made plain that pragmatic or utilitarian purposes do not equate to positive epistemological gains — or, in fact, the need for epistemology in the first place. Paying attention, however, and adding into our practice the results of what we find, would certainly be a part of a pragmatic practice of living, one that Heraclitus wants to promote.

“If all existing things were smoke, it is by smell that we would distinguish them.”

Seems pretty obvious, no? If you were a dog it certainly would with their much more sensitive noses which do the majority of their sensing of their environment as the eyes do for the vast majority of human sensing. The point? Sensing is highly relative and there is little reason to imagine that sensing in one way even begins to approach the totality of either sensing as an activity or sensing what is there in total. In truth, there could be many things that exist we simply can't sense at all. You can't sense a smell by looking at it and you can't hear something you only sense by seeing. Even seeing is subject to how you see for there are many different forms of electromagnetic radiation and visible light [as only human beings call it] is just one of them. Using infra-red light things become visible that couldn't be seen before, for example, and our hearing, another of our senses, only takes place in the context of a certain audio range our human ears can detect. All this puts a big fat relativistic question mark against the senses as organs which inform us about the universe and points to our innate fallibility, a fallibility which should teach humility. Our particular senses are fitted to our form of life; they are not universally capable characteristics fitted to give us total knowledge of our surroundings.

“Corpses are more fit to be thrown out than dung.”

In this fragment Heraclitus comments upon the uselessness of the dead human body, a thing many often honour and imbue with identity whether it be alive or dead. This is very strange and certainly a choice. Looked at in various other ways it is, variously, biological matter, potential energy, or the former host of a person's spirit. None of these ways is a forced view and each has its pros and cons. It is interesting here that Heraclitus comes from the angle of usefulness. Dung has uses such as keeping a fire going. Compared to this, Heraclitus sees the human body, once it is lifeless, as less useful. One imagines he was no fan of the obsequious rituals it undergoes in many places much like those people who, from time to time, stipulate that their body should be eaten by their pets or thrown in the trash. Just why do we think a lifeless corpse is anything more than dead meat anyway?

“Human nature has no real understanding, only the divine nature has it.”

Heraclitus has previously made a few comments which led us to question the reality of a human being's understanding. Now he openly questions it and even denies the human being has it. But he does not say that gods have it since by “divine nature” he likely means something more like the Logos he has previously mentioned, something not sullied with humanity. In a similar way, Taoism can talk of the “divine” yet without talking about imagined deified personalities. Here divine is almost imagined as the antithesis of human but as existing nonetheless. We can even just about see “divine” as an adjective and modifier of nature where nature is the thing imagined as divine. And this is not the least useful interpretation either although in the Greek it is just one word – theion, the divine – which is used. One thing I would take from this, then, is that the human can and perhaps even should be contrasted with the non-human, something which is far greater than the human.

“Humanity is not rational, there is intelligence only in what encompasses human beings.”

And this next fragment carries on that thought from before perfectly and as something to further bruise the oversensitive ego of the human being. Heraclitus denies the human being's innate rationality [as several others in my project have done] and, instead, sees the intelligence [think Logos] in what surrounds humanity, something he sees as “encompassing” said humanity. This is almost a straight up reversal from how some others would see things, fixated, as they are, with the human being's rationality and so ability to give a human invented order to things. As

Heraclitus imagines things, however, they do not need this order as they already have rationality or intelligence all their own [and so not a human one]. This once more brings Heraclitus tolerably into touch with a Taoist mentality in which the Tao is the ineffable order of things. Once more, I am minded to say that the whole is the context for us; we are not the context for it. There is reason to doubt that what we call rationality is rationality at all, something Nietzsche, as but one very pertinent example, will expound upon further. It may be that much of the human imagination about, and constitution of, human beings is faulty and flawed.

“What is divine escapes people’s notice because of their incredulity.”

In the context of the previous two fragments, this fragment is interesting. Heraclitus gives a reason for why “the divine” escapes us: our “incredulity”. Could this be our reluctance to believe things beyond our experience or which we are not habituated too? The thought “that can’t be possible because I’ve never seen/heard/experienced it before” is itself hardly uncommon and is exactly where phrases like “seeing is believing” come from. Yet, in one sense, this mentality is hopelessly egotistical. What kind of person would one have to be to imagine that only those things which one has personal knowledge or experience of can happen or be real? Add into this equation the observations, already made by Heraclitus, which point to the most severe relativity of our senses. Here the point is it would be hopelessly over optimistic to imagine we could have experience of everything let alone to know it as a totality. It is because our knowledge is so miniscule, our understanding so small, our experience so limited, that incredulity even arises in the first place. It is an inability to see beyond ourselves as that being which always, foolishly, wants to make itself the measure. But we aren’t the measure and never could be! Our incredulity is a limitation and a boundary to our developing beyond ourselves and to our acceptance of that which makes no sense to us — which surely much that exists must.

“Although intimately connected with the Logos which orders the whole world, human beings keep setting themselves against it, and the things which they encounter every day seem quite foreign to them.” Perhaps this is the problem then, carrying on in a Heraclitean frame of mind? We, of course, are part of the Logos [or the Tao if we are Taoist about it] for they are in and around everything. It is, in one rendering of “Logos”, the pattern of all things. But do we see this pattern or do we impose our own, self-serving patterns upon things instead? If we do that we cannot but set ourselves against the natural order of things and, if we look around, we can probably quite easily see multiple examples where people actually do do that. Now we can remember, once more, the Heraclitean assertion that things would not be better if people got what they wanted. What people want is not the way of the Logos or of the Tao, these two ideas more fully considered. The only moral we can get from this is to humbly leave things alone because, more often than not, we only make things worse. We make things worse because we set up our intentions and purposes against the way things, left to themselves, would go quite naturally. It is all quite sad and tragic in a way; we had everything we needed but then beset ourselves with wants and created a world ever more strange and foreign, one at odds with the whole itself.

“As in the night-time a person kindles a light, so when a person lies down in death with their vision extinguished, they attach themselves to the state of death; even as one who has been awake lies down with their vision extinguished and attaches themselves to the state of sleep.”

“Immortals become mortals, mortals become immortals; they live in each other’s death and die in each other’s life.”

What I take from these Heraclitean fragments is that death is not the end but neither is identity necessarily what life and death is all about. Thought of as energy all things, including us, go

on endless journeys of transformation over lengths of time we cannot imagine. Here the mortal comes from the immortal and returns back to it. The same energies may well then constitute innumerable identifications as we humans think of it in a universe of constant, chaotic regeneration. All this is to say that we are not ourselves, we are only borrowing the energy that constitutes us. We are not it and it is not us — for there is, in a very real sense, no us. It is then like being awake or asleep. We can be both but neither one is more us than the other one. They are just states energy passes through along with the imagined interpretation of these states, states which are themselves interpretations. And so we come to that mentality which sees no difference between life and death because they are merely an artificial distinction. The greater truth here is that all is one.

“There await human beings after death such things as they neither expect nor have any conception of.”

And, considering many only honour what they have experience of, as already noted, why would they? This is yet another reminder that this existence we experience is not all there is and neither is our experience the standard to measure it by [were it even capable of being measured]. It is, instead, just a narrow letterbox through which we see an imprecise, decontextualised and partial view.

“A person’s character is their guardian divinity.”

The idea behind this fragment is that of the personal psychic shadow, a psychic mirror image, if you will, of the human being. Heraclitus argues that is a person’s character and that it is this which guards them. It is a person’s character which stands as their defence against outside forces. This, of course, makes said character quite important from the perspective of an individual’s relationship to the rest of the world and suggests that it matters in respect of an authentic relationship of one to the other. It is, then, something to pay attention to.

“Fire in its progress will catch all things by surprise and judge them.”

This is to say that energy, here symbolised by fire, will eventually have its say for it is the ultimate judge. There is no escaping physical consequences and they are not something the often vaunted “human ingenuity” could order or avoid.

“Thinking is common to all.”

Although some make more use of it than others, as even Heraclitus has already said. But look at this from a Zen perspective in which enlightenment, or “Buddha Nature”, is available to all and everything you need you already have — if only you realised it. Here this thinking is not a matter of some special skill or learned ability. It is not the privilege of the few but the characteristic of the many. Heraclitus here offers a vision of an interconnected, natural world where our natural endowments are entirely enough if only we didn’t dilute and overcomplicate them with entirely artificial imaginings. The Zen Buddhist is encouraged to let go and the sentiment here is similar. You don’t need to possess something extra but to liberate what is already there. “Men should speak with rational mind and thereby hold strongly to that which is shared in common — as a city holds on to its law, and even more strongly. For even more strongly all human laws are nourished by the one divine law, which prevails as far as it wishes, suffices for all things, and yet somehow stands above them.”

“Law involves obeying the counsel of one.”

Heraclitus conceives of the rational as that which is shared in common here, suggesting interaction and intersubjectivity at the very least. In these fragments he has not been overly fond of the private or personal as much as suspicious of it. Here it is the common or “the one” which

is to be followed and this is not some imagined leader but the Heraclitean one which is the Logos or the universal pattern of rationality or intelligence. Once more, a Taoist sense can be given to this in that the Taoist would be encouraged to follow the Tao which can be taken to mean the [common] way of all things. This, as in the Heraclitus fragment here, “suffices for all things, and yet somehow stands above them”. Interesting here too is the idea that human laws should come from this divine law, a mirroring of nature in its manner of operation. Indeed, Heraclitus seems to say this is unavoidable as one might imagine from a person who has already said we are “encompassed” by a much greater intelligence.

“Dogs bark at a person whom they do not know.”

And, in like manner, people bark at things, or sometimes even people, they don’t know, recognise or understand. Ignorance does not make such people humble or attentive but often more egotistical or arrogant as in when people who live where there are few immigrants vote for those candidates who are against immigration or when people are against ideas they do not understand because they seem foreign. The first reaction is often a disdainful aggressiveness.

“What sort of mind or intelligence have they? They believe popular folk-tales and follow the crowd as their teachers, ignoring the adage that the many are bad, the good are few.”

If intelligence were common, everybody would have it. As it is, it is relatively uncommon, as a perusal of any social media shows quite easily. This extends naturally into the moral sphere as well and today its quite normal to find things intended to deceive or steer those who would believe “folk tales and follow the crowd” into indulging their worst traits. Yesterday, for example, there was a story of a refugee being killed, a story with multiple reliable sources. Some flat out denied it. Others made excuses for it. Yet others wanted all such refugees harassed and intimidated, their boats sunk. It struck me that a lot of ugly hatred and vitriol was being expressed towards people none of those expressing it knew. These people are neither intelligent nor are they good. They are easily led, uncritical, and ready to believe the worst about people they don’t know and will never meet on the day so of bad actors with selfish intentions. They are people without discretion and devoid of *sophrosyne*. And, as Heraclitus makes clear, the problem is that most people are like that. Reading stories such as that one yesterday, its very easy to believe it.

“Hesiod distinguishes good days and evil days, not knowing that every day is like every other.”

This could be a Cynic saying in its nay-saying against civilised convention with its disavowal of some days being good and others bad. But here the motivation is probably different when we recall Heraclitus’ interest in things being one. For him day and night were not things that were objectively and irrefutably different but part of one process – which they are in that they are the mere effect of a planet spinning on its axis. From this perspective, distinguishing between one day and another is beside the point since they are the result of a single phenomenon.

“May you have plenty of wealth, you men of Ephesus, in order that you may be punished for your evil ways.”

When I first read through the fragments of Heraclitus and came upon this one I chuckled. Heraclitus himself, so it is said, came from a wealthy family but he gave it up in order to lead the life of a philosopher. We can see in some of the other fragments what that means here: not going with the crowd, being of independent mind, praising the good and virtuous over the popular. And what, we might ask, is more popular than wealth? Even those who don’t have it praise it in the hope some of it might find its way to them or they might one day achieve it. Heraclitus takes a different view, however. He thinks of wealth as a punishment! It is not too difficult to think why

this might be so, especially in the much less technological times of the pre-Socratic era when protecting said wealth was much more difficult. If you have more, you have more to lose.

“Opposition brings concord. Out of discord comes the fairest harmony.”

Not everyone will agree with this sentiment and it is not uniformly the case in experience. But how does Heraclitus mean it? We know that one of his primary insights is that all things are one, continuous processes and flow rather than objective opposites. Looked at from this perspective, we may say that it is from difference that a harmony can be created [harmony being exactly the conglomeration of differing pitches] and it is from what seems opposed [i.e. day and night] that a concordant unity is created [the turning of the planet]. Heraclitus’ point may then be that from apparent difference and opposition, a higher level of interpretation makes harmonious processes, opposition that becomes concord. One can immediately think of the philosophy of Tao, with its yin-yang symbol, as exactly mirroring this very idea as the entirety of its philosophical core. What may appear at one level discordant and opposed, it at a higher one concordant and harmonious. Is this, in fact, not how our universe appears to be? Heraclitus and Taoism would certainly think so.

“It is by disease that health is pleasant, by evil that good is pleasant, by hunger satiety, by weariness rest.”

This fragment follows on from the previous point in a way. In essence, it tells us that things are relative. Its like night only being night by comparison with the day. Nothing exists by itself but only in the context of a larger whole. Relativity and relationship are key.

“Sea water is at once very pure and very foul: it is drinkable and healthful for fishes, but undrinkable and deadly for men.”

“Donkeys would prefer hay to gold.”

“Pigs wash in mud, and domestic fowl in dust or ashes.”

Here are three fragments which say similar things: to each their own. One man’s meat is another man’s poison. Things are not always the same from case to case and nor do they need to be. We should not expect them to be. Things develop in differing ways and this is the way of all things. What one finds valuable, another may not and each have their reasons, each are moulded and formed by their own unique circumstances. Pigs wash in mud so that a layer of the mud dissuades insects from biting them. Fowl try to smother the same insects in dust. Each have their ways.

“To God all things are beautiful, good, and right. Human beings, on the other hand, deem some things right and others wrong.”

First of all, let us not take the word “God” too seriously. We could say “nature,” “the divine,” or something else just as well. This is not the point of the fragment. The point is instead the comparison between that which does not judge and that which does, i.e. human beings. The point of that comparison, in the context of Heraclitus’ holism, seems to be that human beings have no basis to judge or even that it is wrong to judge things in such a way in themselves. Under a Cynic interpretation it would be argued that human judgments are nothing but arbitrary conventions plucked out of the air in a great many cases. If we read Nietzsche we find many of the morals of human beings, and the apparent bases of their moral thinking, deconstructed and undermined entirely. It was for these and other reasons that an earlier volume in this series was titled *The Fiction of Morality* — for morality is, indeed, a fiction. The universe has no opinion on the beautiful or the good. It has no standard or measuring scale for these things nor sees the need for them. It allows both the very good and the horrifically bad [as humans judge it]

to happen within existence with equal lack of concern. This then stands as context for all the arbitrary judgments of tiny, insignificant human beings, albeit that many will then label such thinking “immoral” as later Christian apologists did Heraclitus. An irony here is that even Jesus in the New Testament makes the point that God sends the warming sun and the refreshing rain on both good and bad alike, showing that even this differentiation is not as absolute as some would like. And then there is the parable of the feast, to which “both good and bad” are invited! In short, we need to do some hard thinking about right and wrong and why they exist at all in the context of a universe in which there are no such things. Once more, the whole is the context for us; we are not the context for it.

“The way up and the way down are one and the same.”

“In the circumference of the circle the beginning and the end are common.”

Again the interest in things which seem opposed but, in fact, are not except in artificially imposed schemes of human thought. In both cases here two are in fact one and differentiation is merely rhetorically so. In the second case, a circle is indeed one and has no end or beginning. [A circle is also a Zen symbol.] But the same can be true of the up and the down if we see them as simple points of view about the same thing. Relativity and relationship decide. Here we learn that such things and their rhetoric shape our experience of the world but without ever being more than that. A world of sometimes useful fictions but fictions nevertheless.

“Joints are at once a unitary whole and not a unitary whole. To be in agreement is to differ, the concordant is the discordant. From many things comes oneness, and out of oneness come the many things.”

In this fragment Heraclitus states his general belief of the relationship of the parts to the whole. What actually is concordance and discordance anyway? Who decides what goes with what and what is harmony and what disharmony? Aren't these actually all artificial judgments? Heraclitus' overarching judgment is that everything is related to everything else and only gets any sense from that fact. One might think, for example, of the human body which is not merely a matter of bits put together but of a whole which functions as a unity. Thus:

“It is one and the same thing to be living and dead, awake or asleep, young or old. The former aspect in each case becomes the latter, and the latter becomes the former, by sudden unexpected reversal.”

Everything is related to everything else in the unending flow of a greater process.

“The hidden harmony is better than the obvious.” The “is better than” grates on me in this fragment for how are we to judge “better”? Much more attractive is the notion of the “hidden harmony”, that which is not immediate and obvious. One can think here productively with reference to music such as that of John Cage which is a lifetime example of “hidden harmony”. Cage, in fact, once said that disharmony is only harmony that you are not yet used to, suggesting both that “harmony” is merely conventional and that harmony as a matter of reality is non-existent. Here is only ever polyphony and it is artificial to designate one kind harmony and another not. Any pluriformity of things is as harmonious or disharmonious as any other, artificial aesthetic judgments set aside.

“People do not understand how that which is at variance with itself agrees with itself. There is a harmony in the bending back, as in the cases of the bow and the lyre.”

Heraclitus is not the only one inspired by the movement of strings as I seem to recall something similar in the Zhuangzi. Putting things under stress or tension, bending them back, are not things which are simply bad in themselves but, contextualised by their movement and con-

sequences, can be part of greater wholes which may be judged differently. Judging things in isolation, then, is never the whole story.

“Listening not to me but to the Logos, it is wise to acknowledge that all things are one.”

Heraclitus does not want you to simply believe as he does in this fragment, something some people regularly seem to want you to do. He simply asks you to appreciate the Logos, the account or pattern of all things, and draw your conclusions from that. From this, he thinks, we will gather that all things are one or that, at the very least, this is the wise course of action.

“Wisdom is one — to know the intelligence which steers all things through all things.”

This fragment is a reiteration of two points: all is one and the metaphor of inter-relation which is “all things through all things”.

“The sun will not overstep his measures; if he were to do so, the Erinnyes, fiends of Justice, would seek him out for punishment.”

This might be read as a warning against all forms of artificial meddling such as human beings increasingly attempt to prosecute. Things have their natural courses, according to Heraclitus. Should things overstep these bounds, by whatever means, then spirits of vengeance, friends of natural justice, will be unleashed which punish the unnatural deed. This fragment then reads as a plea to let things run their natural course and run, as they will, within their natural bounds. Nothing good can come from perverting them for all such actions result in some kind of naturally ordered revenge. Are we listening?

“Even sleepers are workers and collaborators in what goes on in the universe.”

“What?” you are thinking. But all is one, remember? Whether a passive or active, knowing or unknowing participant, we are still participants. Awareness, understanding, knowledge, truth, these are not necessary possessions for participation. What’s more, “when nothing is done, nothing is left undone” as Eastern philosophers of certain persuasions might say. You’re part of the whole whether you do something or nothing and the universe just goes on its way anyway with you an inevitable part of it.

Liezi and Nothing to Stick to

The Liezi is the third in what is imagined retrospectively to be a trilogy of the more famous classical Daoist works together with the Laozi [Tao Te Ching] and the Zhuangzi. As in those other two cases, Liezi is also imagined to be the person inspiring the text. Not much is known about this figure, imagined to come from around 5th century BCE China, and the text itself apparently took centuries to achieve its current form much as is the case with the other two books. In each case we have what would later become regarded as Daoist verities which stem from the imagined inspiration of an original figure. Such text may contain philosophy original to these characters but this does not exclude much that was added in that figure's name as well. It is notable here that there is some overlap between the Zhuangzi, the Laozi and the Liezi indicating common traditions and shared interests. There are fewer translations of the Liezi in English than its more famous textual companions, however, and in what follows I intend to quote excerpts of text from the Liezi as translated by A.C. Graham, Professor Emeritus of the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, who is one Western scholar who did much work elucidating and translating this text for a Western audience. Amongst other points Graham raised were its likely dependent nature on other texts, sections seemingly written in another hand and possible Buddhist influence [Buddhism and Daoism are far from the same thing], all things which speak in favour of a compilation many centuries after its putative inspiration had lived. The book itself, as currently arranged, is split into 8 chapters, most named after famous figures of Chinese history, but this is not important for my purposes here and I will make my annotated quotations only with as much explanation as I find necessary to make my own points [so this is not to be regarded as an overall interpretation of the Liezi]. These points I intend to make consciously after my previous discussion of the fragments of Heraclitus and they should also be borne in mind by readers as they read.

“How well the men of old understood death! The good find rest in it, the wicked submit to it. Dying is the virtue in us going to its destination. The men of old called a dead man a man who has gone back. Saying that the dead have gone back they implied that the living are travellers. The traveller who forgets to go back is a man who mistakes his home.”

This, I would venture to suggest, is not the view most people have of their lives under more modern philosophies of possession and acquisition, of ownership and property. People think they own themselves but the Liezi doesn't. Here the living are travellers who came from being dead and, in dying, go back to it again, life then only a very temporary phase in the existence of something else. And isn't all of this actually correct even in the view of modern, materialist science? But the Liezi's interest is not so much with that as our appreciation of ourselves in the light of it. It wants us not to be forgetful of our context but in accord with it. We should not forget we are going back but be actualised in the light of it. This is exactly the anarchism I spoke of above when discussing if anarchy is even possible. As the Liezi confirms here, it is unavoidable.

“Someone asked Liezi: ‘Why do you value emptiness? In emptiness there is no valuing.’ Liezi said: ‘Value is not the name for it. Best be still, best be empty. In stillness and emptiness, we

find where to abide; Taking and giving, we lose the place. The man who, when his actions go wrong, begins to play about with moral distinctions in order to put them right, cannot find the way back.”

Liezi’s answer to this question seems to say that wrapped up in ideologies and relationships governed by customary practices we lose our place in the order of things. Instead, it is in emptiness and stillness that this place is found — something that could be literally true if all else is imagined to be fiction and imagination. Liezi accepts that there is no valuing there but, instead of complaining about this and arguing for his own partisan values, welcomes it. What he is against is making things up which must then be constantly manipulated to be in our favour, things like right and wrong and moral distinctions, the basis of our valuing. Liezi can do without valuing but not without emptiness, something with which things settle themselves. Liezi is saying there is no way to equilibrium without that for you cannot invent a way to it. You have to let things balance themselves out and give up control and controlling, a very anarchist thing to think.

“Turning without end Heaven and earth shift secretly. Who is aware of it?”

“So the thing which is shrinking there is swelling here, the thing which is maturing here is decaying there. Shrinking and swelling, maturing and decaying, it is being born at the same time that it is dying. The interval between the coming and the going is imperceptible; who is aware of it? Whatever a thing may be, its energy is not suddenly spent, its form does not suddenly decay; we are aware neither of when it reaches maturity nor of when it begins to decay. It is the same with a human being’s progress from birth to old age; their looks, knowledge and bearing differ from one day to the next, their skin and nails and hair are growing at the same time as they are falling away. They do not stop as they were in childhood without changing. But we cannot be aware of the intervals; we must wait for their fruition before we know.”

“It is nonsense to say either that heaven and earth will perish or that they will not. Whether they perish or not we can never know. However, from that side there is one point of view, from this side there is another. Hence the living do not know what it is like to be dead, the dead do not know what it is like to be alive. Coming, we do not know those who went before, going we shall not know those who come after. Why should we care whether they perish or not?”

There is so much of what happens in the constancy of motion and change that is the universe of existence that we do not know about. Probably much of this we could never know. After all, we are what we are, a forever set of limitations. But other things are what they are too. Does it matter if one has knowledge of the other? Not really! Is most of the universe alive or is most of the universe dead? Its not a distinction the universe makes!

““Can one succeed in possessing the Way?”

Your own body is not your possession. How can you possess the Way? If my own body is not mine, whose is it? It is the shape lent to you by heaven and earth. Your life is not your possession; it is harmony between your forces, granted for a time by heaven and earth. Your nature and destiny are not your possessions; they are the course laid down for you by heaven and earth. Your children and grandchildren are not your possessions; heaven and earth lend them to you to cast off from your body as an insect sheds its skin. Therefore you travel without knowing where you go, stay without knowing what you cling to, are fed without knowing how. You are the breath of heaven and earth which goes to and fro; how can you ever possess it?”

This I take to be one of the most commonsensical and straightforward accounts of humanity’s impotence in the face of the universe ever written. This is the anarchy I respond to and which renders all human imagined anarchies follies which lack ambition. You are not you. You are just

part of a morphing, transforming, broiling whole of motion and change. You don't direct where you came from, you don't direct where you are going, you don't direct where you will end up. You are simply part of a continuum in which things happen and not even to you but just simply happen. Who could catalogue all this, who could deign to understand it? What totally ignorant arrogance would this require? Ours?!

"I rob heaven and earth of their seasonal benefits, the clouds and rain of their irrigating floods, the mountains and marshes of their products, in order to grow my crops, plant my seed, raise my walls, build my house. I steal birds and animals from the land, fish and turtles from the water. All this is stealing; for crops and seed, clay and wood, birds and animals, fish and turtles, are all begotten by heaven, and how can they become my possessions? Yet I suffer no retribution for robbing heaven. On the other hand precious things such as gold and jade, and commodities such as grain and silk, are collected by men, and how can we claim that it is heaven which provides them? When you steal them, why should you resent being found guilty?"

Is not your very body stolen? When you must steal the Yin and Yang energies in harmonious proportions even to achieve your life and sustain your body, how can you take the things outside you without stealing them? In reality the myriad things of heaven and earth are not separate from each other; and to claim anything as one's own is always wrong-headed. Kuo's way of stealing is common to all, and so he escapes retribution; your motive for stealing is private, and so you were found guilty. Whether or not you distinguish between common and private, you are still stealing. It is the power of heaven and earth which makes the common common and the private private. For the man who understands the power of heaven and earth, what is stealing and what is not stealing?"

What is the issue here? It is that introducing possession into the equation upsets the whole. Nothing we have is ours; all of it was plundered from nature's resources and claimed as our own. This is where the problems start; this is the root of the beanstalk. But how can you steal when nothing belonged to anyone in the first place anyway? Property may or may not be theft but theft itself is fiction if all is one.

"In this country there are no teachers and leaders; all things follow their natural course. The people have no cravings and lusts; all men follow their natural course. They are incapable of delighting in life or hating death, and therefore none of them dies before his time. They do not know how to prefer themselves to others, and so they neither love nor hate. They do not know how to turn their faces to things or turn their backs, go with the stream or push against it, so nothing benefits or harms them. There is nothing at all which they grudge or regret, nothing which they dread or envy."

"Now I know that the utmost Way cannot be sought through the passions. I know it, I have found it, but I cannot tell it to you."

This passage delineates an ideal state or simply an ideal. It is Daoist in that it is about actionless action and lack of intention. Human beings here don't follow desires but just let things happen — as everything else but human beings does already. They also lack preferences and have no opinions and this delivers them from disappointment, partisanship and enmity as well as from distinguishing between life and death which the universe itself does not do. This leads to a natural life without benefit or harm. So you cannot seek the Way but only let go and fall into it. It is not something we can describe but in the silence beyond words and so beyond humanity. Again, we must stop trying to measure and to control.

"The sage hides himself in Heaven, therefore nothing can harm him."

“I follow the Way of the water instead of imposing a course of my own; this is how I tread it... Having been born on land I am safe on land—this is native to me. Having grown up in the water I am safe in the water—this is natural to me. I do it without knowing how I do it— this is trusting destiny.”

You cannot be harmed where harm is not perceived. And you cannot perceive harm where everything is one — but only when it is separated into things.

“The utmost in speech is to be rid of speech, the utmost doing is Doing Nothing.”

Silence and inactivity or wisdom beyond words and intentions?

“Liezi went home, and for three years did not leave his house. He cooked meals for his wife, served food to his pigs as though they were human, treated all things as equally his kin. From the carved jade he returned to the unhewn block, till his single shape stood forth, detached from all things. He was free of all tangles. Once and for all, to the end of his life.”

Simplicity, the Daoist virtue of compassionate interrelatedness which returns the artificial and fictional to the natural.

“If you insist on making an effect, it will unsteady your basic self, and to no purpose. None of your companions will tell you. All their small talk is poison. Unless we wake each other, how shall we mature?”

Zen would have us accept that there is no self as a static entity and so perhaps we should talk about disturbing our energies in a Daoist vocabulary here. Either way, such disruption, which comes from having purposes and intentions, is imagined to disturb us and to no purpose [meaning we gain nothing from our desires]. But other people, people like us, won't tell us this. To them such things are normal and this suggests that often friends or companions will not tell us difficult things for fear of disrupting either the relationship or our common understanding. But the Liezi's Daoism does not leave it at that. It regards the matter of maturity in our existence as a social matter, a matter of educating each other so that we wake up not alone but together. If we cannot wake up by ourselves then how else shall we if not through someone else?

“In the world there is a Way by which one will always conquer and there is a way by which one will never conquer. The former is called Weakness, the latter is called Strength. The two are easy to recognise, but still men do not recognise them. Hence the saying of the men of the most ancient times: ‘The strong surpass those weaker than themselves, the weak surpass those stronger than themselves.’ The man who surpasses men weaker than him self is in danger when he meets someone as strong as himself; but the man who surpasses men stronger than himself is never in danger. The saying ‘By this you conquer your own body and make it your servant, by this you employ the whole world as your servant’ means that you conquer not others but yourself; employ not others but yourself.”

This is a riddle but it is riddle that is saying that the strong will always beat the weak yet will be in danger when they come up against someone as strong as them but, meanwhile, the weak will always win exactly because of their weakness. It seems consequent to imagine, then, that the success of the weak is not based on strength as is their never being in danger. But the passage then flips to being about not conquering others but yourself and, in so doing, the whole world becomes your servant — which is only to employ yourself. Here I can only think to imagine, once more, of the way of water which, weak or strong, always overcomes and has success by quiet, controlled persistence.

“The breath of all that lives, the appearance of all that has shape, is illusion. What is begun by the creative process, and changed by the Yin and Yang, is said to be born and to die; things which,

already shaped, are displaced and replaced by a comprehension of numbers and understanding of change, are said to be transformed, to be illusions of magic. The skill of the Creator is inscrutable, his achievement profound, so that it is long before his work completes its term and comes to an end. The skill of the magician working on the shapes of things is obvious but his achievement shallow, so that his work is extinguished as soon as it is conjured up. It is when you realise that the illusions and transformations of magic are no different from birth and death that it becomes worthwhile to study magic with you. You and I are also illusion; what is there to study?"

What does it mean to say that created things, things with shape, are "illusion"? Well it doesn't mean, first and foremost, that they don't exist. Liezi does not imagine we are trapped in a vat like Neo in *The Matrix* and in receipt of deceptive electrical impulses, that "nothing is real". The book is here seeking to contrast creation with magic and, of course, the point about magic is that exactly what the magician is seeking to make you believe and perceive is exactly what is not happening. The person hasn't been cut in half, the rabbit hasn't appeared from nowhere, the magician did not inexplicably escape the impossible locks and chains whilst underwater. Yet this passage says that life and death is also like that and, when it does so, I think it is saying something about our believing and our perceiving. It is saying that what we think about life and death is like how the magician does magic tricks; it is "illusion and transformation". Yet, being illusion and transformation, what is there then to study? In this passage all is change.

"With rank high enough to distinguish you, and more property than you need, you are too far above other men. Dreaming at night that you are a slave, reverting from ease to toil, is fortune righting itself. Can you reasonably expect to have it both ways, dreaming as well as awake?"

Here the Liezi gives away its belief in balance like the Yin and the Yang in balance in the Yin Yang symbol Daoists use. It is a belief that, left to themselves, things balance out and find natural equilibrium — and the world goes on its way in harmony as it should.

"It is beyond me to distinguish dreaming and not dreaming."

Dreaming and being awake is a thing I constantly seem to be coming back to as I work my way through this project. This sentence from the Liezi might essentially be the reason why: it is all but impossible to distinguish one from the other. Even a day or two ago I was watching an interview with the smart writer and director, Alex Garland, a man who thinks about consciousness and determinism and the shape of human being, in which he suggested that our form of life, being ultimately subjective for each one of us as a consciousness, is very much akin to a dream. Of course, it would be a waking dream but a kind of dream state nevertheless. I find the observation fascinating and it takes on more significance when we read thoughts like this one from Liezi here. Perhaps we cannot distinguish dreaming and not dreaming. Perhaps the only distinction is waking dream or sleeping dream. But, this being so, it then puts ideas like knowing, understanding and explaining in question. What can a dreamer know, understand or explain and wouldn't they only be doing it in the terms of their dream state? Can we even wake up? Can we be awake and not know it? The Buddhist imagines that Buddha Nature — essentially becoming awake and being enlightened — is always already there but we just don't realise it yet — until or unless we do. But then my mind falls upon the word "distinguish" in the sentence above, distinguishing being a work of the intellect. None of my reading in Daoist or Buddhist texts has ever suggested to me that "enlightenment" comes from or through the intellect but rather from letting it go. And still the metaphor persists ... is sentience a dream? Recall Zhuangzi's butterfly dream! Does Zhuangzi dream he is a butterfly or the butterfly dream he is Zhuangzi?

“Formerly, when I forgot, I was boundless; I did not notice whether heaven and earth existed or not. Now suddenly I remember; and all the disasters and recoveries, gains and losses, joys and sorrows, loves and hates of twenty or thirty years past rise up in a thousand tangled threads. I fear that all the disasters and recoveries, gains and losses, joys and sorrows, loves and hates still to come will confound my heart just as much. Shall I never again find a moment of forgetfulness?”

Staying with the metaphor of the dream and adding this passage into the equation the dream state seems to be welcome. Remembering specifics is a confusion of tangled threads. The idea is that these are deceptive and that only a clear mind is not. Both Daoism and Zen concentrate on regularly clearing the mind of stray and random thoughts, a regular cleaning process that does not inhibit the mind by filling it with stuff, stuff which leaves it unhygienic. Here, in a vocabulary of remembering and forgetfulness, seems to be a similar thought. We are reminded that emptiness, and so the forgetfulness which maintains it, is a virtue.

“Nowadays everyone in the world is deluded about right and wrong, and confused about benefit and harm; because so many people share this sickness, no one perceives that it is a sickness. Besides, one man’s abnormality is not enough to overturn his family, one family’s to overturn the neighbourhood, one neighbourhood’s to overturn the state, one state’s to overturn the world. If the whole world were abnormal, how could abnormality overturn it? Supposing the minds of everyone in the world were like your son’s, then on the contrary it is you who would be abnormal. Joy and sorrow, music and beauty, smells and tastes, right and wrong, who can straighten them out?”

Here is a problem: things cannot be decided on the basis of numbers. Yet, in a furtherance of the same problem, they almost routinely are. That is right or normal or accepted which a large enough number of people say or do or think or believe. This is “deluded” and “confused”. Right is not right because it has sufficient numbers who accept it. Benefit is not benefit because the right amount of people say so. This passage even asks which of us can set such things straight in the first place! When all have the same sickness even the sickness becomes seen as simply normal and nothing to worry about! “There was a man who was born in Yen but grew up in Chu and in old age returned to his native country. While he was passing through the state of Chin his companions played a joke on him. They pointed out a city and told him: ‘This is the capital of Yen.’ He composed himself and looked solemn. Inside the city they pointed out a shrine: ‘This is the shrine of your quarter.’ He breathed a deep sigh. They pointed out a hut: ‘This was your father’s cottage.’ His tears welled up. They pointed out a mound: ‘This is your father’s tomb.’ He could not help weeping aloud. His companions roared with laughter: ‘We were teasing you. You are still only in Chin.’ The man was very embarrassed. When he reached Yen, and really saw the capital of Yen and the shrine of his quarter, really saw his father’s cottage and tomb, he did not feel it so deeply.”

How do you know you know something? Chances are that at least some of the things you think you know are because you trust the people who told you the things. This story, however, suggests that not all such people may be so trustworthy [or maybe even that knowledge on such terms is always doubtful]. Outside of the fact that you trust these people, how else would you know if what they said were true or false? The man here seemingly has no other way of knowing, trusts them, and then realises he has only been teased. But there is a consequence: when he finds the real place it now means less to him. What has happened? Does he now trust that he knows less? One imagines that, having been teased and having what he thought he knew by trust taken

away from him, it is something he will never get back. He has been robbed of innocence and is now merely fated to play the game of knowing and not knowing.

“Rejoicing in nothing and knowing nothing are the true rejoicing and the true knowledge; and so you rejoice in everything, know everything, care about everything, do everything.”

How fortunate that the next selection should be this one! In passages like this the thought seems to be that concretizing things we think we know can only deceive us. Instead, the openness of nothing is seen as more opportune, keeping your options open, if you prefer. In a world of motion and change nailing anything down will always be a risk. It also limits you and forces you to side with one thing and against another whereas the openness of nothing allows everything to become acceptable.

“My body is in accord with my mind, my mind with my energies, my energies with my spirit, my spirit with Nothing. Whenever the minutest existing thing or the faintest sound affects me, whether it is far away beyond the eight borderlands, or close at hand between my eyebrows and eyelashes, I am bound to know it. However, I do not know whether I perceived it with the seven holes in my head and my four limbs, or knew it through my heart and belly and internal organs. It is simply self-knowledge.”

Know thyself! And to know thyself be in accord with Nothing!

“Tzu-hsia asked Confucius: What sort of man is Yen Hui? For kindness, he is a better man than I am. What about Tzu-kung? For eloquence, he is a better man than I am. Tzu-lu? For courage, he is a better man than I am. Tzu-chang? For dignity, he is a better man than I am. Tzu-hsia rose from his mat and asked: Then why do these four serve you? Sit down, I will tell you. Yen Hui can be kind, but cannot check the impulse when it will do no good. Tzu-kung can be eloquent, but cannot hold his tongue. Tzu-lu can be brave but cannot be cautious. Tzu-chang can be dignified, but cannot unbend in company. Even if I could have the virtues of the four men all together, I should be unwilling to exchange them for my own. This is why they serve me without misgivings.”

The wisdom here is that any characteristic, however good or commendable, is not uniformly good in all circumstances. Since the Daoist world is a world of constant change, the ability to stop at the appropriate time is also necessary.

“The joy of travel is that the things which amuse you never remain the same. Other men travel to contemplate the sights, I travel to contemplate the way things change.” Flexibility, enjoyment of change, this is a Daoist virtue.

“By outward travel we seek what we lack in things outside us, while by inward contemplation we find sufficiency in ourselves. The latter is the perfect, the former an imperfect, kind of travelling.”

“In perfect travel we do not know where we are going, in perfect contemplation we do not know what we are looking at. To travel over all things without exception, contemplate all things without exception, this is what I call travel and contemplation.”

It is a Daoist and a Zen theme that there is sufficiency within ourselves and that we already have all we ever need. This idea is imagined here in the inward contemplation that neither knows what it looks at nor where it is going. Best be empty!

“I do not think it an honour if the whole district praises me, nor a disgrace if the whole state reviles me; I have no joy when I win, no anxiety when I lose; I look in the same way at life and death, riches and poverty, other men and pigs, myself and other men; I dwell in my own house as though lodging in an inn, look out at my own neighbourhood as though it were a foreign and

barbarous country. Having all these ailments, titles and rewards cannot induce me, punishments and fines cannot awe me, prosperity and decline and benefit and harm cannot change me, joy and sorrow cannot influence me. Consequently, it is impossible for me to serve my prince, have dealings with my kindred and friends, manage my wife and children, control my servants.”

Can one live life without good and bad, better and worse, benefit and harm? Is one condemned to preferences? This is not the Way. But ...

“To be born normally, coming from nowhere, is the Way... to be born depending on nothing is called the Way, and to live out your term depending on the Way is called normal. Death which depends on your manner of life is also called the Way, and premature death which depends on the Way is also called normal.”

Nothing and nowhere, ignorant of the fictions of words and thought, going about your business: this is the Way.

“The eye is about to grow dim when it can discern the tip of a hair; the ear is about to go deaf when it can hear the wings of a gnat; the palate is about to deteriorate when it can discriminate between the waters of the Tzu and the Sheng; the nostrils are about to clog when they can distinguish scorched and rotten smells; the body is about to stiffen when it delights in sprinting; the mind is about to go astray when it can recognise right and wrong. Therefore if a thing does not reach its limit it will not revert.”

There is a Yin Yang principle here: when something reaches its limit, it can only come back.

“By conceiving something you fail to identify it; By pointing it out you fail to reach it; By treating it as an object you fail to exhaust it... Without concepts, your mind is the same as it; Without pointing, you reach everything; Whoever exhausts the object exists forever.”

Earlier, when discussing dreams, I talked about distinguishing, an intellectual activity. Here this seems to be the error, something which [quite literally] separates us from things in the act of intellectually distinguishing them [which perhaps makes them instrumentally useful for us as we see it]. In the mentality of the Liezi conceiving is not identifying and pointing is not possessing. Objectifying does not get at the totality of a thing. Intellect is not putting everything in its place. Rather, it is without these things that access to everything is granted. Exhausting the object, breaking its bounds, is to exist forever.

“If nothing within you stays rigid,
Outward things will disclose themselves.
Moving, be like water.
Still, be like a mirror.
Respond like an echo.”

How can we be like the Way in its manner of operation? By being flexible, by being reflective, by being unaffected but just passing by.

“Things make themselves go counter to the Way, the Way does not go counter to things. The one who successfully accords with the Way uses neither eyes nor ears, neither effort nor mind. If, wishing to accord with the Way, you seek it by means of sight and hearing, body and knowledge, you will not hit on it.”

The Way is not knowing and the knowing do not find it. It is by knowing you go astray and by knowing you can only go astray. As the Zen practitioner John Cage used to say, “You will only make things worse.” And so ...

“The Way is not something that the presence of the mind can dismiss and the absence of the mind can bring nearer. It is grasped only by one who grasps it in silence and lets it mature naturally.”

“The start of one is the end of another, The end of one is the start of another. Who knows which came first?”

This is once more like dreaming and not dreaming. Where to begin? Why bother?

“Everything contains something smaller, and is contained in something larger, without bound or limit. Heaven and earth contain the myriad things, and are contained in the same way by something else, which contains both the myriad things and heaven and earth, and is therefore unbounded and limitless. Besides, how do I know that beyond heaven and earth there is not a greater heaven and earth? That is another thing I do not know.”

Boundaries and limits are all false, arbitrary, fictional impositions. In motion and change and transformation there is only relationship without end. Not that we could know these relationships!

“Inscrutably, in endless sequence,
They come to pass of themselves by the Way of Heaven.
Indifferently, the unbroken circle
Turns of itself by the Way of Heaven.
Heaven and earth cannot offend against this,
The wisdom of sages cannot defy this,
Demons and goblins cannot cheat this.
Being of themselves as they are
Silently it brings them about,
Gives them serenity, gives them peace,
Escorts them as they go and welcomes them as they come.”

An ode to the Way. It doesn't know, it doesn't care, it doesn't want. And yet it maintains and sustains all things in peace, a constant companion. Inscrutable. Indifferent. Undefeatable.

“What heaven does not know, how can Man discern?”

A slap in the face for knowledge, a rebuke to the seekers of Truth. We are puny ants. How could we ever imagine to know? Foolishness! If you could set out the workings of universe then you would be above it yet it is obvious that you are not! Knowledge obsession is a mania and a most inappropriate egotism.

“Valuing life cannot preserve it, taking care of the body cannot do it good; scorning life cannot shorten it, neglecting the body cannot do it harm. Hence some who value life do not live, some who scorn it do not die, some who take care of the body do it no good, some who neglect it do it no harm. This seems unreason able, but it is not; in these cases life and death, good and harm, come of themselves. Some value life and live, some scorn it and die, some take care of the body and do it good, some neglect it and do it harm. This seems only reasonable but it is not; in these cases also life and death, good and harm, come of themselves.”

These seem strange and counter-intuitive things to say but they aren't if you believe, as Liezi does, that life and death come of themselves anyway. By this is meant not that one cannot do something to extend one's life or do something to end it but that things do not always have the same or arbitrary outcomes as in the case of the heavy smoker who lives to 100 years old whilst

another dies of lung cancer at 65. In short, there's no algorithm of the Way! So things, aside from our arbitrary descriptions of them, come and go as they may in a world of motion and change. We can act and those action take part in this world of motion and change but the whole goes on just as it has always done — inscrutably. “For the man who trusts destiny, there is no difference between long life and short; for one who trusts the principles by which things hap pen, nothing to approve or reject; for one who trusts his mind, nothing which is agreeable or offensive; for one who trusts his nature, nothing which secures or endangers him. Then we may say that there is nothing at all which he either trusts or dis trusts. He is true, he is genuine; what should he shun or approach, enjoy or grieve over, do or not do?”

Here the Way has a name and that name is destiny. But destiny is not the way things must happen conceived of in minute detail. Destiny is abandoning oneself to actionless action, to life without description or knowledge, to things as they will happen without opinion. Destiny is the Way in its manner of operation. It is order as anarchy and anarchy as order. This is authenticity.

“Success on one side seems to be success, but fundamentally it is not. Failure on one side seems to be failure, but fundamentally it is not. Hence error is born from seeming. The division between seeming and truth is confused; but if you are not confused by seeming, you will not be shocked when misfortune befalls you, will not rejoice in the good fortune you have achieved.”

Now do you understand why the Daoist advises you to simply cease to cherish your own opinions? And so ...

“To meet death unafraid, to live in distress without caring, is to know destiny and accept what time brings.”

“It is not by knowledge that one is complete or deficient; completeness and deficiency come of themselves.”

A repetitive theme. There are no rules of anarchy. There is no algorithm of the Way. It cannot be captured in human thought. Knowledge is a mistake if, by means of it, you imagine to understand or explain, gain power over or control.

“There was a man of Wei, Tung-men Wu, who did not grieve when his son died. His wife said to him: No one in the world loved his son as much as you did. Why do you not grieve now he is dead? I used to have no son, he answered, and when I had no son I did not grieve. Now that he is dead, it is the same as it was before when I had no son. Why should I grieve over him?”

Perspective. What was once will be again. The little in the context of something bigger. Always.

“Reality has nothing to do with reputation, reputation has nothing to do with reality. Reputation is nothing but pretence.”

Which suggests that reality is not pretence. But it doesn't say that you can say what reality is, just that it doesn't have a reputation.

“It is in life that the myriad things of the world are different; in death they are all the same. In life, there are clever and foolish, noble and vile; these are the differences. In death, there are stench and rot, decay and extinction; in this we are all the same. However, whether we are clever or foolish, noble or vile, is not our own doing, and neither are stench and rot, decay and extinction. Hence we do not bring about our own life or death, cleverness or foolishness, nobility or vileness. However, the myriad things all equally live and die, are equally clever and foolish, noble and vile.”

Different yet the same, diverse yet going the same way. Life and death.

“Rotten bones are all the same, who can tell them apart?”

“Yuan Hsien grew poor in Lu, Tzu-kung grew rich in Wei. Yuan Hsien’s poverty injured his life, Tzu-kung’s wealth involved him in trouble. If that is so, wealth and poverty are both bad; where is the right course to be found? It is to be found in enjoying life, in freeing ourselves from care. Hence those who are good at enjoying life are not poor, and those who are good at freeing themselves from care do not get rich.”

Compare the Jew Qoheleth: “There is nothing worthwhile for a person but to eat and drink and afford themselves enjoyment with their means. And even that comes from God” [Ecclesiastes 2:24]. Both recommend enjoyment, freedom from care, and for Liezi this is wealth, wealth which means you do not become rich.

“A man was asked about tending life and he answered: ‘It is simply living without restraint; do not suppress, do not restrict.’ ‘Tell me the details, his questioner replied and he said: ‘Give yourself up to whatever your ears wish to listen to, your eyes to look on, your nostrils to turn to, your mouth to say, your body to find ease in, your will to achieve. What the ears wish to hear is music and song, and if these are denied them, I say that the sense of hearing is restricted. What the eyes wish to see is the beauty of women, and if this is denied them, I say that the sense of sight is restricted. What the nostrils wish to turn to is orchids and spices, and if these are denied them, I say that the sense of smell is restricted. What the mouth wishes to discuss is truth and falsehood, and if this is denied it, I say that the intelligence is restricted. What the body wishes to find ease in is fine clothes and good food, and if these are denied it, I say that its comfort is restricted. What the will wishes to achieve is freedom and leisure, and if it is denied these, I say that man’s nature is restricted.’”

All these restrictions are oppressive masters. If you can rid yourself of these oppressive masters, and wait serenely for death, whether you last a day, a month, a year, ten years, it will be what I call tending life. If you are bound to these oppressive masters, and cannot escape their ban, though you were to survive miserably for a hundred years, a thousand, ten thousand, I would not call it tending life.”

What is Liezi’s key to life? Living simply without restraint or restriction which means without imposition. Where one craves specifics and seeks to impose and define one will live more miserably than one could. This is not living serenely as one would if one just let things be. And this is not a matter of what happens or length of life either. All this is irrelevant. Desires are oppressive masters and oppressive masters are always trouble.

“Once I am dead, what concern is it of mine? It is the same to me whether you burn me or sink me in a river, bury me or leave me in the open, throw me in a ditch wrapped in grass or put me in a stone coffin dressed in a dragon-blazoned jacket and embroidered skirt. I leave it to chance.”

Yet, sadly,

“Most of the gentlemen in Wei live by the manners they have been taught; naturally they are incapable of grasping what was in this person’s mind.”

It is like those people who say that after their death they wish to be fed to their pets. What does it matter? It is just flesh. Don’t be fooled by its form, don’t give its form more reality than it has.

“What is the point of prolonging life?... Be resigned to everything, let everything run its course; why need you delay it or speed it on its way?”

This is a question I have asked myself several times. These people, like the futurist Ray Kurzweil as one example, why do they want to live for centuries or even longer? What is life

or death, now or later, longer or shorter? A person who lived for 1000 years will be eternally dead the same as the person who lived 10 years. Things will always run their course and no anxiety is needed. Let them and then there is no need for anxiety at all. Change yourself rather than worrying about the fact you will change.

“Humanity resembles the other species between heaven and earth, and like them owes its nature to the Five Elements. It is the most intelligent of living things. But in humanity, nails and teeth are not strong enough to provide defence, skin and flesh are too soft for protection: it cannot run fast enough to escape danger, and it lacks fur and feathers to ward off heat and cold. It must depend on other things in order to tend its nature, must trust in knowledge and not rely on force. Hence the most valuable use of knowledge is for self-preservation, while the most ignoble use of force is to attack others. However, my body is not my possession: yet once born, I have no choice but to keep it intact. Other things are not my possessions; yet once I exist, I cannot dispense with them. Certainly, it is by the body that we live; but it is by means of other things that we tend it.”

Here is mystery, mystery in humanity’s form of existence. It is specific, yet different from other forms. It is good for one thing, yet not for another. It has this, but lacks that. It exists by itself, yet must rely on other things. It is me, but it is not mine.

“If you do not go against destiny, why should you yearn for long life? If you are not conceited about honours, why should you yearn for reputation? If you do not want power, why should you yearn for office? If you are not greedy for wealth, why should you yearn for possessions? One who sees this I call a man in accord with things.”

And so:

“An insatiable nature is a grub eating away one’s vital forces.”

“Be careful of your words,
For someone will agree with them.
Be careful of your conduct,
For someone will imitate it.”

The best words are silence? The best doing is Doing Nothing?

“We judge by our own experience, verify by the experience of others.”

This is a neat observation. It tells us we never navigate life alone, even if we think we have set ourselves apart. We always have the responsibility but never bear the burden alone.

“Nowhere is there a principle which is right in all circumstances or an action that is wrong in all circumstances. The method we used yesterday we may discard today and use again in the future; there are no fixed right and wrong to decide whether we use it or not.”

Radical amorality — as I tried to discuss in the second book of this project, subtitled *The Fiction of Morality*. I take this to be commonsensically true as well as pragmatically so. Once more flexibility is the Daoist virtue and not inappropriately fixed or algorithmic morals. If existence is change then fixity is always a mistake.

“To call food criminal and refuse to eat it, because the one who offers it is a criminal, is to confuse name and the reality.”

“If benefit goes out from you, the fruits will return to you; if resentment goes forth from you, harm will come back to you. What issues from within and is answered outside is mere passion. Therefore, the wise one is careful of what they let out.”

This seems like some kind of karmic saying but this is not karma as a Buddhist might describe it. Here it is suggested that what you give out will come back to you but it is then only suggested that you be careful what you let out. It is not suggested that the fruits or the harm that come back to you will be negative or positive in the end. We do not control the future but we can affect it and are related to it.

“The myriad things between heaven and earth, born in the same way that we are, do not differ from us in kind. One kind is no nobler than another; it is simply that the stronger and cleverer rule the weaker and sillier. Things take it in turns to eat each other, but they are not born for each other’s sake. Human beings take the things which are edible and eat them, but how can it be claimed that heaven gave birth to them originally for the sake of human beings? Besides, mosquitoes and gnats bite our skin, tigers and wolves eat our flesh; did heaven originally breed human beings for the sake of them?”

Human beings are used to ascribing a fictional order to the various orders of life, perhaps in a table or chart. It is nonsense. Nothing was created for something else and nothing was created better or worse than another thing. There are people and bacteria, ducks and anteaters, lizards and crabs, viruses and plants. Each live out their lives as they are enabled to – which in many cases includes taking and eating some of the other things for nature in general survives by consuming itself. In this, no creature or organism is good and no creature or organism is bad. None of them is noble and yet none of them is profane. They just are and they just exist as they can without need for praise or blame.

“There was a man who lost an axe and he suspected the boy who lived next door. He watched the boy walking down the street: he had definitely stolen the axe! His expression, his talk, his behaviour, his manner, the way he walked, everything about him betrayed that he had stolen the axe. Later that day the man was digging in his garden and he found the axe. The next day he saw the boy from next door again in the street: nothing in his behaviour and manner suggested the boy would steal an axe!”

A story which challenges us to ask what is guiding our thoughts and if we can trust it. The answer is that it is nothing reliable and it is something which changes with circumstances.

“There was a man who wanted gold. At dawn he got up, put on his coat and went to market. He went up to the stall of a dealer in gold, snatched some of his gold and made off with it. The police chased him, caught him and then questioned him. ‘Why did you snatch somebody else’s gold in front of so many people,’ they asked. ‘When I took it, I did not see the people but only the gold,’ he replied.”

The human intellect focuses on its object of desire but overlooks so many other obvious things. This should inspire us to think more about it and set it in its proper place. It is not a measure of all things whatever else it is.

All composite things are impermanent,
They are subject to birth and death;
Put an end to birth and death,
And there is a blissful tranquillity.

The First Daoist Anarchist Text: Neither Lord Nor Subject

The following text comes from around 300 BCE and is arguably the first text that can be called anarchist which can also be called Daoist. The period before this is a period in which the figures of Laozi, Liezi and Zhuangzi were formative figures and in whose names later key Daoist texts would be compiled and formulated. This period in Chinese history was a period of warring states and many commentators have argued that this historical situation was one reason that Daoism, in once sense a survivalist philosophy, came to exist. Because of this, many of these texts have content regarding government or how to be a leader or addressing if leaders are even needed in the context of the Way they observe through nature all around them. Of course, they were not the only school of thought at the time and so sometimes they react to positions taken by other, more pro-civilisation, schools such as the Confucians or Mohists. As such, in this text and those more famous others, a Daoist position which supports an anarchistic view not only regarding government and politics but also of nature and existence, is set out in my view. Here I present Bao Jingyan's text in full for its brief presentation of a formative Daoist anarchism.

The Confucian literati say: "Heaven gave birth to the people and then set rulers over them." But how can High Heaven have said this in so many words? Is it not rather that interested parties make this their pretext? The fact is that the strong oppressed the weak and the weak submitted to them; the cunning tricked the innocent and the innocent served them. It was because there was submission that the relation of lord and subject arose, and because there was servitude that the people, being powerless, could be kept under control. Thus servitude and mastery result from the struggle between the strong and the weak and the contrast between the cunning and the innocent, and Blue Heaven has nothing whatsoever to do with it.

When the world was in its original undifferentiated state, the Nameless (wu-ming, i.e., the Tao) was what was valued, and all creatures found happiness in self-fulfilment. Now when the cinnamon-tree has its bark stripped or the varnish tree is cut, it is not done at the wish of the tree; when the pheasant's feathers are plucked or the kingfisher's torn out, it is not done by desire of the bird. To be bitted and bridled is not in accordance with the nature of the horse; to be put under the yoke and bear burdens does not give pleasure to the ox. Cunning has its origin in the use of force that goes against the true nature of things, and the real reason for harming creatures is to provide useless adornments. Thus catching the birds of the air in order to supply frivolous adornments, making holes in noses where no holes should be, tying beasts by the leg when nature meant them to be free, is not in accord with the destiny of the myriad creatures, all born to live out their lives unharmed. And so the people are compelled to labour so that those in office may be nourished; and while their superiors enjoy fat salaries, they are reduced to the direst poverty.

It is all very well to enjoy the infinite bliss of life after death, but it is preferable not to have died in the first place; and rather than acquire an empty reputation for integrity by resigning office and foregoing one's salary, it is better that there should be no office to resign. Loyalty and righteousness only appear when rebellion breaks out in the empire, filial obedience and parental love are only displayed when there is discord among kindred.

In the earliest times, there was neither lord nor subjects. Wells were dug for drinking water, the fields were ploughed for food, work began at sunrise and ceased at sunset; everyone was free and at ease; neither competing with each other nor scheming against each other, and no one was either glorified or humiliated. The wastelands had no paths or roads and the waterways no boats or bridges, and because there were no means of communication by land or water, people did not appropriate each other's property; no armies could be formed, and so people did not attack one another. Indeed since no one climbed up to seek out nests nor dived down to sift the waters of the deep, the phoenix nested under the eaves of the house and dragons disported in the garden pool. The ravening tiger could be trodden on, the poisonous snake handled. Men could wade through swamps without raising the waterfowl, and enter the woodlands without startling the fox or the hare. Since no one even began to think of gaining power or seeking profit, no dire events or rebellions occurred; and as spears and shields were not in use, moats and ramparts did not have to be built. All creatures lived together in mystic unity, all of them merged in the Way (Tao). Since they were not visited by plague or pestilence, they could live out their lives and die a natural death. Their hearts being pure, they were devoid of cunning. Enjoying plentiful supplies of food, they strolled about with full bellies. Their speech was not flowery, their behavior not ostentatious. How, then, could there have been accumulation of property such as to rob the people of their wealth, or severe punishments to trap and ensnare them? When this age entered on decadence, knowledge and cunning came into use. The Way and its Virtue having fallen into decay, a hierarchy was established. Customary regulations for promotion and degradation and for profit and loss proliferated, ceremonial garments such as the [gentry's] sash and sacrificial cap and the imperial blue and yellow [robes for worshipping Heaven and Earth] were elaborated. Buildings of earth and wood were raised high into the sky, with the beams and rafters painted red and green. The heights were overturned in quest of gems, the depths dived into in search of pearls; but however vast a collection of precious stones people might have assembled, it still would not have sufficed to satisfy their whims, and a whole mountain of gold would not have been enough to meet their expenditure, so sunk were they in depravity and vice, having transgressed against the fundamental principles of the Great Beginning. Daily they became further removed from the ways of their ancestors, and turned their back more and more upon a human being's original simplicity. Because they promoted the "worthy" to office, ordinary people strove for reputation, and because they prized material wealth, thieves and robbers appeared. The sight of desirable objects tempted true and honest hearts, and the display of arbitrary power and love of gain opened the road to robbery. So they made weapons with points and with sharp edges, and after that there was no end to usurpations and acts of aggression, and they were only afraid lest crossbows should not be strong enough, shields stout enough, lances sharp enough, and defences solid enough. Yet all this could have been dispensed with if there had been no oppression and violence from the start.

Therefore it has been said: "Who could make sceptres without spoiling the unblemished jade? And how could altruism and righteousness be extolled unless the Way and its Virtue had perished?" Although tyrants such as Chieh and Chou were able to burn men to death, massacre

their advisers, make mincemeat of the feudal lords, cut the barons into strips, tear out men's hearts and break their bones, and go to the furthest extremes of tyrannical crime down to the use of torture by roasting and grilling, however cruel they may by nature have been, how could they have done such things if they had had to remain among the ranks of the common people? If they gave way to their cruelty and lust and butchered the whole empire, it was because, as rulers, they could do as they pleased. As soon as the relationship between lord and subject is established, hearts become daily more filled with evil de signs, until the manacled criminals sullenly doing forced labour in the mud and the dust are full of mutinous thoughts, the Sovereign trembles with anxious fear in his ancestral temple, and the people simmer with revolt in the midst of their poverty and distress; and to try to stop them revolting by means of rules and regulations, or control them by means of penalties and punishments, is like trying to dam a river in full flood with a handful of earth, or keeping the torrents of water back with one finger.

The Anarchist Manifesto of a First Century Cynic Jew

Overture

In the beginning was the reason of the universe and the principle of existence. This was the beginning and this was god. This is why things happen and why there are things. Nothing happens apart from this and this is nothing. This is life and light and this is also absence of life and darkness. For there is no difference that is not part of a whole. Not everyone recognises this but some do, enlightened beings who share their wisdom. We are all children of this reason, progeny of existence. We do not have to do, say or believe anything to be this for it is just the case, the way of all things. For life begets life, life feeds on life in one great process. We are all oneness. Every branch grows from the same tree. This tree feeds us even as we feed on it and all things draw their sustenance from the same source. Non-being gives birth to being and being feeds on being before becoming non-being again. From this fullness we all receive, all living things, grace upon grace with a bountiful compassion. No one has ever seen what sustains things but how things are makes such reason and existence known.

Jesus, from Nazareth, appeared in Galilee and he said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." He gathered some disciples to him, both male and female, and he would habitually teach them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed the hungry, for you will be fed. Blessed those who mourn, for you will be consoled. Love your enemies and pray for those persecuting you so that you may become sons and daughters of heaven; for the sun rises on the bad and on the good alike and the rains water both the just and unjust. Offer the one who slaps you on the cheek the other cheek as well; and give the person wanting to take you to court to get your shirt your coat as well. For the one who conscripts you for one mile, go with them a second mile. To the one who asks of you, give; and from the one who borrows, do not ask back what is yours. And the way you want people to treat you, that is how you should treat them. For if you only love those who love you, what reward do you have? Doesn't pretty much anyone do the same thing? And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what reward do you have? Everyone does that. Instead, be compassionate as the way of heaven is compassionate. Do not pass judgment in order not to be judged yourself. Your measure can easily be used to measure you too! Don't be blind in order to lead the blind and so both end up falling down a hole. Do not find small faults with others whilst leaving your own huge ones unexamined. Sort yourself out first and then you can concern yourself with others. Be aware that bad trees don't bear good fruit and neither does a good tree bear bad fruit. The fruit makes the tree known. You don't get apples from orange trees or bananas from apple trees. Even so, the good bear good fruit and the bad bear bad. And just like that from the human heart the mouth speaks. So the question is will you be like someone who builds their house on rock who, when rain and floods come, stands on

a firm foundation; or will you be like someone building on sand who ignores words of wisdom, goes their own stupid way, and their house falls down?"

One day someone came up to Jesus and said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the sky have nests; but the human being does not have anywhere to lay their head." But another said to him, "Master, permit me first to go and bury my father." However, Jesus replied, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

Jesus was in the habit of sending out his followers to the surrounding villages and he told them:

"Look, I send you out like sheep in the midst of wolves. Don't carry a purse, nor a knapsack, nor sandals, nor a staff, and greet no one on the road. If you go into a house, first say, "Peace be upon this house". If someone peaceful is there, let your peace rest upon them; but if not, let your peace return to you. Stay at that house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the worker is worthy of their reward. Do not move around from house to house. Whatever town you enter, where they take you in, eat what is set before you. Cure the sick there, and say to them, "The kingdom of heaven has come to you." And remember, whoever takes you in takes each one of us in and even the kingdom of heaven."

To those who came to Jesus anxious about the circumstances of their lives he would say:

"Do not place value in earthly treasures which can be defaced or ruined and where robbers can steal them. Instead, value for yourselves the treasures of heaven. For these cannot be defaced or ruined and robbers cannot steal them. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. So do not be anxious about your life, what you are to eat, nor about your body and what you will wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothing? Consider the birds: They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet they are fed. Are you not better than the birds? And anyway, who of you, by being anxious, is able to suddenly make food appear? And why are you anxious about clothing? Observe how the flowers of the field grow: They aren't working like crazy to look that way but even the finest of us doesn't look so good. If wild flowers look so good all by themselves then there's no need to worry about yourself either. So, do not be anxious, saying, "What are we to eat?" or, "What are we to drink?" or, "What are we to wear?" These are common concerns yet nature provides. Seek the kingdom of heaven and all these shall be granted to you."

It was Jesus' habitual practice to tell parables about the kingdom of heaven. For example, he would say:

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed which a person took and threw into their garden. And it grew and developed into a tree and the birds of the sky nested in its branches."

Then again he would say:

"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast which a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until it was fully fermented."

Another was:

"A rich man had prepared a large feast and invited many. When everything was ready he sent out a servant to call the people to his party. The servant went along to each invited guest in turn but first one declined because he had business to do, a second had things to do on his farm and a third was preparing for a wedding. The servant went back to his master and told him what had happened whereupon he was hopping mad. Then, he turned to his servant and said, 'Go out into the streets and invite whomsoever you find there, good and bad alike.'"

One more was:

“There was a rich person who had a great deal of money. He said, ‘I shall invest my money so that I may sow, reap, plant, and fill my storehouses with produce, that I may lack nothing.’ These were the things he was thinking in his heart, but that very night he died. Anyone here with two ears had better listen!”

And yet another was:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a woman who was carrying a jar full of meal. While she was walking along a distant road, the handle of the jar broke and the meal spilled behind her along the road. She didn’t know it; she hadn’t noticed a problem. When she reached her house, she put the jar down and discovered that it was empty.”

One more example is:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a person who wanted to kill someone powerful. While still at home he drew his sword and thrust it into the wall to find out whether his hand would go in. Then he killed the powerful one.”

There were several things that Jesus used to proclaim to people he would meet. He would say:

“The first will be last and the last will be first.”

“If you exalt yourself you will be humbled and if you humble yourself you will be exalted.”

“The one who finds their life will lose it but the one who loses their life will find it.” “The one who does not hate their father and mother cannot follow me and the one who does not hate son and daughter cannot follow me.”

“Salt is good; but if salt loses its saltiness how will it become salty again? Its not fit for the earth or the dung heap. It gets thrown away.”

“No one can serve two masters; for a person will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve Heaven and Mammon.”

“If someone sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. And if they sin against you seven times, also forgive them seven times.”

“The kingdom of heaven does not come visibly. Nor can one say, ‘Look, here!’ or, ‘Look, there!’ for the kingdom of heaven is within you!”

Regarding the presence of the kingdom of heaven Jesus had more to say when he used to say the following things:

“If your leaders say to you, ‘Look, the kingdom is in the sky,’ then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, ‘It is in the sea,’ then the fish will precede you. Rather, the kingdom of heaven is within you and it is outside you.”

“Know what is in front of your face, and what is hidden from you will be disclosed to you.”

“If you do not fast from the world, you will not find heaven. If you do not observe the sabbath as a sabbath you will not see the kingdom.”

“Be passersby.”

“Congratulations to the person who has toiled and has found life.”

“Those who know all, but are lacking in themselves, are utterly lacking.”

“If you bring forth what is within you, what you have will save you. If you do not have that within you, what you do not have within you will kill you.”

“There are many standing at the door, but those who are alone will enter the bridal suite.”

“One day some disciples of Jesus came to him and asked him: ‘Do you want us to fast? How should we pray? Should we give to charity? What diet should we observe?’ Jesus replied, ‘Don’t lie, and don’t do what you hate, because all things are disclosed before heaven. After all, there is nothing hidden that will not be revealed, and there is nothing covered up that will remain

undisclosed.” “You see the sliver in your friend’s eye, but you don’t see the timber in your own eye. When you take the timber out of your own eye, then you will see well enough to remove the sliver from your friend’s eye.”

“The Pharisees and the scholars have taken the keys of knowledge and have hidden them. They have not entered nor have they allowed those who want to enter to do so. As for you, be as sly as snakes and as simple as doves.”

His disciples said to him, “is circumcision useful or not?” He said to them, “If it were useful, their father would produce children already circumcised from their mother. Rather, the true circumcision in spirit has become profitable in every respect.”

Would you have knowledge of the kingdom of heaven? Jesus said:

“The person old in days won’t hesitate to ask a little child seven days old about the place of life, and that person will live. For many of the first will be last, and will become a single one.”

“The person is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea and drew it up from the sea full of little fish. Among them the wise fisherman discovered a fine large fish. He threw all the little fish back into the sea, and easily chose the large fish. Anyone here with two good ears had better listen!”

“I will give you what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, what no hand has touched, what has not arisen in the human heart.” “Nursing babies are like those who enter the kingdom of heaven.”

“Whoever has something in hand will be given more, and whoever has nothing will be deprived of even the little they have.”

“Whoever among you becomes a child will recognize the kingdom of heaven.”

“A person cannot mount two horses or bend two bows. And a slave cannot serve two masters, otherwise that slave will honor the one and offend the other. Nobody drinks aged wine and immediately wants to drink young wine. Young wine is not poured into old wineskins, or they might break, and aged wine is not poured into a new wineskin, or it might spoil. An old patch is not sewn onto a new garment, since it would create a tear.”

“Congratulations to the poor, for to you belongs Heaven’s kingdom.”

“I disclose my mysteries to those who are worthy of my mysteries. Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”

“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant who had a supply of merchandise and found a pearl. That merchant was prudent; he sold the merchandise and bought the single pearl for himself. So also with you, seek his treasure that is unfailing, that is enduring, where no moth comes to eat and no worm destroys.”

“Why have you come out to the countryside? To see a reed shaken by the wind? And to see a person dressed in soft clothes, like your rulers and your powerful ones? They are dressed in soft clothes, and they cannot understand truth.”

“Let the one who has become wealthy reign, and let one who has power renounce it.” “Whoever is near me is near the fire, and whoever is far from me is far from the kingdom of heaven.”

“Come to me, for my yoke is comfortable and my lordship is gentle, and you will find rest for yourselves.”

“If you have money, don’t lend it at interest. Rather, give it to someone from whom you won’t get it back.”

“Whoever drinks from my mouth will become like me; I myself shall become that person, and the hidden things will be revealed to him.”

“The kingdom of heaven is like a person who had a treasure hidden in his field but did not know it. And when he died he left it to his son. The son did not know about it either. He took over the field and sold it. The buyer went ploughing, discovered the treasure, and began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished.”

“Let one who has found the world, and has become wealthy, renounce the world.”

Saying that “Wisdom is vindicated by all her children,” Jesus would argue that it is just as bad to be angry and disaffected with someone as it is to kill them; that you should reconcile with people rather than be at odds with them; that to burn with lust over someone is just as bad as adultery; that to make oaths is needless and worse than simple honesty; that an eye for an eye is not justice but that unstinting generosity is better; that you should love your neighbours and your enemies equally. In all things you should be as perfect as the way of heaven. Summing this up, he said, “Go and learn what ‘I desire mercy not sacrifices’ means.”

The following story is told about Jesus:

“Once, as Jesus was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.’ He said to him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.’ Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ‘You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of heaven!’ And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of heaven! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.’” Afterword

By any measure, the man called Jesus was no ordinary, anonymous man. Don’t believe me? Well, you’ve heard of him and, considering he was just some First Century Jewish Galilean repair man, at least according to one report, that’s some pretty good going already. In another series of books, six so far, I have discussed him, and the literature about him, in much more detail than I can here in this context. Yet the two series of books intersect in the matter of Jesus of Nazareth for my conclusion in the other series was that Jesus was a kind of Cynic Jew and some of the evidence for that is contained in the overture above. [Much more is contained in particularly books 3 and 5 of the other series.] My historical argument is that Jesus was a kind of Cynic — like Diogenes — but a Jewish kind. Cynics, as I have already claimed several times throughout this series of books, were amongst the first kinds of people we might label anarchists today. Hence the relevance of Jesus to an anarchist handbook: he, too, was a kind of anarchist and in the sayings and stories above we have some of his anarchist manifesto as it has been unintentionally passed on by others.

So I admit that my identification of Jesus as anarchist rests in no small amount on the similarities between him as he is presented there and a recognisable Cynic practice. They are remarkably similar without being suspiciously identical. Yet Jesus, of course, was not trying to be an anarchist — no such idea probably existed at the time — and I am not even convinced he was consciously trying to be a Cynic either. Probably, he thought he was being a good Jew [a thing to be, at that time, which involved both religious and political views as we judge these things today]. But he

does not need to be trying to be either a Cynic or an anarchist to be usefully understood as them or in comparison to them. Here we are dealing in an understanding of the content about him, and a plausible historical understanding of it, rather than trying to tell people what was in his head, something only he could ever tell us. In this respect, it doesn't matter what was in his head. It matters if anarchism makes sense of his reported words and actions. To this end, a little Cynic refresher course might be in order.

If, for example, we consider a popular anthology of the Cynics such as Robert Dobbin's *The Cynic Philosophers from Diogenes to Julian* what do we learn about this way of life and the thought associated with it? In this book Dobbin gives a concise introduction to the Cynics in terms of their ethics and values and the key themes which identify them to others before sketching out biographies of a list of Cynic notables of whom, of course, the most important, the Cynic icon himself, Diogenes 'the Dog', is paramount. [Interestingly, and perhaps surprisingly, Dobbin also makes reference to 'The historical Jesus as a Jewish Cynic' here too.] Thereafter, Dobbin anthologizes a concatenation of ancient texts relevant to Cynics and Cynicism to give readers a feel for this phenomenon.

However, the question immediately needs to be asked if 'Cynicism' is so easily pinned down or if, in fact, it is more a fact of 'the Cynics' as a matter of individual Cynic performance rather than 'Cynicism' as a movement. Disparity between the actions and beliefs of individual Cynics, albeit that betray familial similarities, is, in fact, one of its most profound legacies. Cynics weren't copies of each other and we shouldn't expect them to be. In his work writing of the lives of ancient philosophers, for example, the chronicler Diogenes Laertius makes this point himself when he discusses the "doctrines found among Cynics in general, working on the presumption that Cynicism really is a distinctive school of philosophy and not – as some maintain – just a way of life." I myself would fall at that end of the spectrum which regards it more as an anarchistic "way of life" than a "school of philosophy". This is because Cynicism had no tests to pass to become a Cynic and Cynics did not have doctrines but only practices. One did not go anywhere to "learn "Cynicism" – unless it was back to the wild where you simply did it. Indeed, Cynics are, in fact, autodidacts and the normal Cynic mode of learning was observation of nature and the use of your God-given reason [whichever God that happened to be in your culture] to learn from what you observed. That said, students of the ancient Cynics still manage to fettle from these disparate individuals [and often they were individuals although even this is not uniform] a set of markers which, in cross referencing them, leads us to those we might describe as 'Cynic'. Such a list goes something like this:

- reversal of values
- acceptance of suffering and an attitude of endurance
- imagining the way to the blessing of contentment has been found [where this involves both justice and virtue]
- a simplicity of existence
- askesis
- an attitude which defaces the currency of civilisation

- renouncing of money, possessions, fame and power
- having a philosophy that is a lifestyle rather than a set of beliefs
- a withdrawal from traditional institutions and disinterest in them as entities
- acting with the licence of the outsider
- eulogizing poverty
- self-sufficiency [Greek: “autarkeia”]
- detachment from civic and economic society
- living with nature
- bold speech
- being regarded by the populace as “wise” and as acting out of a moral reason
- a distinctive dress of cloak, bag and staff
- a performative, educating purpose to their existence

This is not meant to be a technical essay about Jesus yet it would be my suggestion that If we cross reference Jesus and his movement [for, in reality, there was a small community of such people] with the Cynics using the texts I have presented above then we get a goodly amount of interaction between them and such markers of the Cynic as I have referenced here from a reading of Dobbin’s book about the Cynics. Of course, there is much more to it than this. Yet if you read about Jesus in the texts I have quoted above, or even directly from the most relevant historical sources which have placed the historical man into their chosen literary frameworks, you get a guy wandering about with people he has collected along the way who talks about “the kingdom of heaven”. They are detached from society, seemingly without homes, jobs or even families [perhaps because Jesus insisted they choose between them and his movement]. They have a simplicity of existence and a self-sufficiency and imagine the world turned on its head where the poor have a kingdom [of heaven] and the riches of the rich count for nothing. They seem, to all intents and purposes, like outsiders and probably want to be because their lifestyles are an expression of their rejection of the economic, social and political world as others order it. This doesn’t make it easy on them but they face the consequent hardship with endurance and as an askesis. They are itinerants and they give up what they have even as Jesus encourages them to do exactly that. They regard this as virtuous and as a better way to live and Jesus seems to teach it as such. Their faces are turned towards a direct relationship with “the kingdom of heaven” in a way that no human being mediates. This gives them a complete lack of interest in earthly authorities and powers and a radicalised concept of how one person relates to another and towards the kingdom they claim to be involved with which is now the sole context of their existence. This, as can perhaps be seen, unites the social, the spiritual, the political and the philosophical under one anarchist rubric.

This is only a brief discussion of something books can be written about but that is deliberately so so that you may focus more on the texts above which report what Jesus said rather than my

narrative about it. My argument is, if you appraise this material, that it is plausibly a form of anarchism, an anarchistic manifesto of a lifestyle and practice that was suited to a small group of people around Jesus in the 20s of the First Century in Galilee. It is a lifestyle in which Jesus and his group detach from society [to form their own?] and teach values and practices antithetical and contrary to it. The regular authorities of the time, political as well as religious, are not so much acknowledged here as ignored, bypassed by the passersby. What we have is the beginnings of an evolutionary form of anarchism, one which bypasses contemporary authorities because their authority is no longer recognised. [This, by the way, I see as inspirational as an anarchist strategy. Rather than fighting authorities, you simply ignore them and deny them their power.] In what he did, Jesus, together with his community [by which I do not mean anyone called “Christian” for this occurred before Christianity had ever happened], was intending to make them irrelevant by growing a community which evolved beyond and without them. This, of course, is not the Christian narrative and neither is it the narrative of those who would later go on to do things, so they claimed, in Jesus’ name. But that is not his fault. Or his problem. I ask only that you read texts like the ones I have quoted above to see what you make of this radical, anarchist Jesus and the anarchist, community message implicit and explicit in his words.

Anarchism is Not Socialism and its Not Civilisation

I have been reading the works of two differing anarchists, the American Lucy Parsons and the Italian Errico Malatesta. Both are regarded by modern students of anarchism as genuine anarchist voices from the past. But when I read them I have problems and they are problems I have with those who conceive of anarchism generally as a matter of human, political action generally. These problems are not concerned with their words condemning the actions of government and the human lack of need for such an entity. Both equally well expose government as the exploiter of the many for the benefit of the privileged few, and for the capitalist class in particular, equally well. Both show how government and corruption by capital interests are unavoidable bedfellows just the same. On this, we have no disagreement.

It is, however, when we come to what replaces this in their various rhetorics that the differences emerge. Parsons, for example, talks about our need to be “civilised” as if “civilisation”, and the values of such a thing, were our friend. Malatesta, on the other hand, whilst keen to remove the yoke of government, is equally keen to replace it with another yoke called “solidarity” or, in other places, “voluntary solidarity” although, in that latter formulation, it is not clear that this is voluntary since, throughout his 1891 pamphlet “Anarchy”, he seems to argue for its necessity in replacing government in society rather than our ability to forego it. Indeed, Malatesta in that same document suggests that the “freedom” he and anarchists like him want is “not an absolute metaphysical, abstract freedom”, something which he imagines can be perverted into oppression, but the freedom “which is the conscious community of interests”. Malatesta imagines that if we had this then we would have the freedom which is each member of society chipping in and doing their bit quite willingly and cooperatively.

Yet my mind goes back to one of my imagined forebears in spiritual and philosophical anarchism — Diogenes the Cynic. Judged by the civilised and — let us speak plainly — socialist standards of Lucy Parsons and Errico Malatesta was Diogenes, who defaced coinage, took advantage of whatever natural food and shelter he could find and lived a mostly solitary life [albeit he mingled with others] an anarchist? By their standards, no. But this then becomes exactly the point at issue and that point is the values involved. There is a certain type of anarchist — Malatesta and Parsons may well be two examples of such — for whom anarchism is basically socialism and for such people these two are not so much constant bedfellows as they are regarded as the same thing. I am not one of these people and, for me, anarchism neither implies nor requires socialism — nor is socialism necessarily anarchism at all. There are obvious 20th century examples of why this is so. Russia and the Soviet Union, for example, might have been socialist but this was not anarchism. And, to be honest, I find it just as hard to imagine how state socialism, which is what any socialism founded on the basis of national borders would be, is any kind of anarchism at all.

Yet this is not the root of the problem. For the root of the problem we need to go beyond the reordering of the deckchairs on the Titanic of society that those such as Parsons and Malatesta undertake. Such people survey society and see oppression, poverty, squalor, the domination, economic and political, of some by others, and they condemn it as unjust, unnecessary and unconscionable. I am with such people entirely when they do that and largely for the reasons that they give. A modern, capitalist state is an engine of exploitation that aims to profit a few at the expense of the many and no genuine anarchist could stomach its continuance for any longer than it takes to replace it. However, for all its many irredeemable faults, such a political organisation of society has obviously had certain consequences. It has created a certain kind of civilisation, the kind we see around us today. Indeed, such states have been precisely the process of ever deeper and more thoroughgoing “civilisationing” of human society. This has created not just certain material conditions as the contexts for increasing numbers of lives but a whole raft of expectations – civilised expectations – which certain self-proclaimed anarchists have then seemed to take up and take over as if these were to be incorporated in something properly called anarchism. Diogenes had expressed anarchism as a rejection of civilisation at the level of a 4th century BCE Greek city state. In recent centuries, we’ve had anarchists who wanted to anarchise 19th, 20th and 21st century civilisation rather than to replace or ignore it. In order not to be misunderstood at this point I should like to make it plain that, contrary to notable anarchists of past and present, people like Parsons and Malatesta, I want to question if the anarchist progress we seek is simply a matter of the political reorganisation of society for the purpose of retaining the imagined benefits of civilisation but by means more politically palatable and justifiable. Should government be kicked out and “solidarity” [which is really Malatesta’s word for socialism] be put in its place, are we any better off? Are we more free? Is this anarchy? What, to question Lucy Parsons, has being “civilised” got to do with any of this when someone like Diogenes [and perhaps also the proto-Daoists] would have told us that being civilised was exactly the problem? Is there a place here for the naive idealisms of those who would tell us that, were human beings set free from the yoke of government, a sentimental feeling would descend upon them and then all human beings together would suddenly work as one for the good of all, old enmities forgotten and old values set aside? It is true to say that both Parsons and Malatesta point out that a good deal of education might need to take place before such things could be achieved – and surely both do realise that people are educated primarily by that which they become used to – but a fundamental question remains in place for both of them and all those like them who see anarchism as the work of political reorganisation of society: does your kind of freedom give me, and any others, the freedom to ignore the context you wish to impose upon things and to mind our own business? Those who care about political organisation will, it seems to me, insist on their preferred options for they are saying its something we must determine, create and keep in place. Such things are a form of civilisation.

So, as I read Parsons and Malatesta, I am not always so sure that their version of freedom leaves us what I would call anarchistically free. They both seem to want a de facto political organisation to be the case in the world. They both configure the world socially and want to determine the context for social interaction taking place to provide for the needs of human beings. In short, they both, and certainly not only they in the history of political anarchism, imagine civilisation continuing, if in ways more politically suitable to their tastes. They are, I think, thinking of people as classes and imagining the world based on what they regard as the right relationships between these classes. They have become obsessed with a certain kind of political theorising, one that

focuses on a socialist/capitalist binary opposition. This is their first, and a fatal, mistake, one the Daoists of old did not imagine when they imagined the Daoist idyll, as they sometimes did. Their thinking has been shaped by the world of their experience and its values in a way they might not have realised so that what civilisation wants they want too – but just by better means, as they see it.

Yet people are not classes. People are individuals. People may think for themselves, act for themselves and decide their own needs and priorities in life for themselves. Indeed, most of us would imagine some kind of coercion to be taking place where such things were inhibited. Civilisation has told people that certain standards and certain things are things that they should expect to have and be induced to want and, in some but not all cases, anarchists, perhaps persuaded by the need to have a convincing rhetoric for civilised people, seem to want them too. But I can't go along with them. Civilisation, its values and its tendencies, are the problem and not the solution. An anarchised civilisation is a contradiction in terms. Its anarchy or civilisation, as the first anarchists suggested, and not anarchy and civilisation. You can't have anarchy and an organised economy for anarchy says things will organise themselves without it being any kind of organisation at all. So you might have to choose between anarchy and Netflix rather than imagining you can have both. You might have to do without mobile communications devices if you want social justice and equality. You might have to source your own food and maintain your own shelter and do without wasting your time watching You Tube videos if you want an end to government.

I am, of course, suggesting that anarchism, anarchistically configured, does not concern itself with the world. That, in fact, is exactly what the anarchy of nature is [and so often the anarchy of those taking their cues from nature as the first anarchists did]. It is not concerned with how things turn out for everyone or the prosecution of an ideologically acceptable plan for the world. It has no plan: it just takes place for it is not civilised. It is at odds with that kind of anarchism which is a political motivation for the pursuance of social and organisational goals. Anarchy has no goals and anarchism is merely the practice of life where one is free – and not least free from civilisation and its centralising tendencies. In this, I have no doubt that human solidarity would be a good thing in many cases and I don't think that, in every case, "civilised" values are uniformly bad. Yet neither do I think that these are things that should be mandated or should be goals. There shouldn't be any goals: this is anarchy! If any given person is not free to not want what you want, to not act as someone else prescribes, than I see no anarchy here. I see the coerced compromises of civilisation [even a socialist civilisation!] which become the hegemonies of a privileged few or the forced customs of collectives – and I see both as equally undesirable. So anarchism for me is the dissolution of borders and the annihilation of countries and the concept of nationality. It is a revaluing of all values, as Nietzsche described it, because anarchism is, first and foremost, a matter of values and not of politics and political organisation. It is about each person at the personal level and not about how people are organised when thought of as groups or classes of person. Anarchy, first of all, is the situation we as living human beings are in, a state and condition of our existence, and not something we may or may not create. Anarchism that rushes straight to how society is politically ordered is more concerned with ideological organisation than anarchy's disorder as order. It is anarchism that has forgotten that no leaders means no leadership except that which each being has as a part of its own constitution.

But now you're scared because my anarchism seems a lot more anarchic than yours. Its dangerous and not safe. Its anarchy that you don't control! [What else would anarchism be?!] You might actually have to take responsibility for the whole of your life under my description of

such an anarchism. The safety net is hard to see here. But did Diogenes talk about a safety net? Did Zhuangzi imagine us worrying about medical care for society? Civilisation does that, promising you long life and peace so long as you participate in its game. Do you believe this lie it cannot demonstrate in practice? Anarchy and anarchism, on the other hand, now becomes the spiritual and philosophical thing I have been claiming all along it is exactly because of this: it is a matter of differing values. Its a matter of asking what your life is and how it comes to be and you can't go any further with anarchy and anarchism until you have answered this question. Many, of course, well known anarchists included, never ask this question and assume that civilisation, and the values it promotes and supposes, is what life is all about: what it provides, an imagined anarchist society should also provide. Therefore, such people never question if civilisation has got life right or not and neither do they ask how civilising activities have shaped and affected the people it has maintained and supported. Yet its exactly this that the spiritual and philosophical anarchists do put in question. Is life about its length, as a civilised person might maintain, or its quality regardless of length, as a spiritual and philosophical anarchist might maintain, for example? Is it about "social wealth", as the civilised Malatesta suggests, or individual freedom in a world that is a natural anarchy, as a spiritual and philosophical anarchist might suggest?

Be of no doubt that where you land in answering these questions will determine what values you have. For me, anarchism must be more thoroughgoing than wanting to supply the same kind of life to people, albeit one with more equal distribution of resources in a world more free of coercion, on better political terms. As I have already described it, this type of anarchism seems little more than reorganising deckchairs on the Titanic so that everybody gets a bit more of the sun on the way down. This, it seems to me, whilst not a bad outcome, is an inadequate one and one in which anarchism is reduced to a political theory and so restricted from being genuine anarchism. As my metaphor suggests, its an epic missing of the point. Such a genuine anarchism would be an anarchism of values and goals, a real freedom rather than a freedom to be told to live in another way that isn't like the old way you were told to live in before. Enforced socialism is no more anarchism than statism, government or capitalism is. Genuine anarchism is self-knowledge, self-education and self-determination, albeit in a world where you are not the only thing that exists.

You might reply that socialist civilisation is better than capitalist civilisation though and I wouldn't really disagree. But I'm an anarchist and not a socialist and anarchism is not socialism! I believe in freedom pushed to its farthest possibilities and that means freedom from societal values, from civilising, as much as it means freedom to share values with others. It means freedom from the centralising tendencies of the socialist human being as much as the capitalist one and we may note here that both might equally want "civilisation", regardless of their other profound differences, for civilisation services both equally well. It means noting that civilisation itself is far from a benign outcome of human existence and activity, one that has, in myriad ways, produced multiple forms of harm. Even as I write this there is a global panic about Covid-19, a corona virus, the spread of which has been magnified and enabled many times over by the existence of civilisation even whilst that same civilisation argues over how, or even whether, to stop its spread. This has all been made incredibly more complicated by civilised people's need to carry on with their civilised lives, the form of life many of them are now entrapped within in their metropolitan existences. Numerous civilised people have hoarded supplies leaving the most vulnerable with little or nothing. "Yay!" for civilised values and the world it has created by creating networks people could take advantage of in order to hoard. Such forced centralisation, a by-product of the

civilisation project, has endangered us all. It is not clear that socialism would have saved us either although in more socially-minded countries they seem to have got it under control better than those not so socially-minded.

This is but one current example and I encourage everyone to think about civilisation and the pitfalls of its existence and the problems it creates. They are things at least some anarchist forebears thought were destructive of a proper humanity. I also encourage people to compare it to the anarchism of actionless action that I have spoken to in my series of books on the subject of anarchy. My argument here, as part of that wider argument, has been that anarchism is not socialism even though anarchists may choose to act socially or even out of social concern. It has also been that anarchy and civilisation are two very different and, in my view, incompatible things. If you look at the characteristics of anarchy as I have discussed it in four books it is not something deliberately organised with set aims and purposes or desired outcomes. Anarchy, and so any anarchism that models its manner of operation, has no desired outcomes but simply enables only the outcomes that can, at any given time and place, happen.

Accepting this would, no doubt, require a change of mind in a great many who now consider themselves anarchists yet who would also not like to lose the relatively comfortable, civilised lifestyles that they have been in receipt of thanks to civilisation – if they can help it at all. Unfortunately, though, they must choose. This is because anarchism, whilst being about the exploited workers on poverty wages and the corporate conglomerates who want to poison your land so that its executives can become billionaires, is also about whether having a mobile phone is compatible with social justice or if owning luxury possessions is compatible with the world taking place as it can without desire or intention. I think its not and so I see civilisation and anarchy as antagonistic as Diogenes did and as the first Daoists did, those who placed simplicity far above civilisation – thought of as values. They were those who thought the antidote to civilisation's ills was simplicity. So I see civilisation as the problem rather than, as sadly all too many do, as the standard. And so I see authentic anarchist living, the practice of an anarchist life, as not something that civilisation gets to define or standardise. "Peace comes from within. Do not seek it without," The Buddha is reported to have said. Doing so, it seems to me, he suggested that organising the world, even in ways we might imagine better, is not our concern. And besides, it will organise itself anyway along much more properly uncivilised, anarchist lines. All by itself. That is what I think Cynics and Daoists alike once understood very well.

And its the only way it can.

Anarchist Liturgy IV: Mind Inscriptions

INSCRIPTION ONE

What mind is like does not come up:

Why try to find it?

Originally there is no teaching:

Why talk about smoke and fire?

Backwards and forwards,

Holding on to what you've known:

Stop it!

These things are a waste of time.

In a quiet place where you can see,

Find out for yourself.

The past is empty.

Attached to knowing,

You only get confused.

If you think you understand,

You're only seeing darkness.

With an obstructed mind,

No teaching passes through.

But if things come and go as they may,

What deception can then pass?

Existence and non-existence are the same

And each become illuminated in turn.

If you want clarity of mind

Use the effort of no-mind.

When extremes are not emphasised

This is the most penetrating point.

Know teaching without knowing;

Not knowing is all the knowing you need.

If you hope to keep your mind still,

You are still sick.

Simply living and dying without desire:

This is original nature.

How things fit together is not a matter of discussion,

Being neither this nor that.

If you want to live and act in understanding and harmony,

Live in the moment always.

If that moment is nothing,
Be completely in that nothing.
Don't waste your time creating an order of things:
This is the mysterious void.
Thoughts come and go,
Don't bother with "before" and "after".
One thought leads to another,
Nothing more to say!

In all worlds there is nothing,
No mind, no enlightenment.
Every being has a mind without thinking
And nowhere is where such a mind emerges.
Distinguishing between ordinary folks and sages
Only leads to trouble!

Calculating and scheming all the time
Is like looking for truth by ignoring what you've learned.
By ceasing your need to control good and bad
Illumination will fill you up.
There's no need to be clever
When you need only think like a child.

With your sharpest intelligence
You see how error-strewn opinions
Insidiously percolate the world.
Don't look for anything,
Be quiet,
In a dark place without moving.
Your sharpest intelligence won't lie.
In a dark, quiet place
Comes the brightest light!

Everything that is, is the case,
A network of existence.
Regardless of events, stay still:
Don't grasp at things.
There's nowhere to go
And no one's going there!
Don't hold;
Don't scatter;
Don't delay;
Don't be sickly;
A quiet illuminating of things as they happen
Without words to explain it!

Remember this without looking for specifics.
Don't try to limit your nature by seeking this and not that.

Such discriminating is empty,
So just let it come and go as it pleases.
No clean and dirty,
No shallow and deep.

A beginning but no "then",
A continuance but no "now".
A fiction of abiding dissolved
Leads to original mind.

Waking up
Does not require holding on to anything.
What does not exist
Does not require you to do anything to get rid of it.

Wisdom is self-illuminating,
All teachings return to this point.
Without coming back to them,
Devoid of attainment,
Detach from perceptions
And cease to grasp for things.

The one mind-nature
That does not deceive
Is originally balanced.
It tames and corrects;
It cannot be led astray.
It is not arising
Yet neither is it the same
As the sense faculties.
It follows the way of all things,
Fits into all situations
And keeps itself to itself.
It is the awakening
That is not awakening.
It is awake
When it is no longer awakening.

There are two extremes:
But who can call them "good" and "bad"?
What seems to exist
Originally did not;
Non-existent and unmade.

The mind that knows isn't mind;
No sickness and no medicine.
Are you confused?
Let go of the fiction of things.
That's all it takes!

Since there's no grasping,
Don't throw things away either.
"Is" is misleading language;
Who can really say what exists?
How can language use make something the case?
"Emptiness" is the expression of something
Resembling appropriateness.
But you shouldn't try to extinguish your errors of thought:
Just let your thinking go.
No-mind causes thinking to cease;
Mind is extinguished with non-action.
Emptiness is not to be investigated,
It does its own illuminating.

Banishing life and death
Is a matter of mystery
With open eyes
Seeing what arises.
Letting things come and go,
Mind disappears.
Objects being erased,
Each collapses into the other.
One is quieted,
And then the next:
One and the same.
When they no longer arise
There is only
Quietness,
Calmness,
Illuminated Emptiness.
You are awake
With a mind like pure water.

Nature is stupid
Without "near" or "far".
Approving and disapproving
Are never-ending,
Without fixed address.
Night is like day,
And day is like night.
Don't think about it again.
You might seem like a fool,
Stubborn and pedantic,
To those outside.
But inside your mind is
Empty of all truths.

Strength is not responding
To the outside
Without being deceived
By “inside” or “seeing”.
Everything just appears,
In all,
Through all.

Thinking leads to turmoil and darkness.
Natural motion of movement and ceasing drains it away.
This is the only way to all the teachings.
And then there is nothing remaining:
Overwhelming wisdom,
Emptiness,
Nothing.
Awake but not awakened;
Emptiness without a narrative.
Nothing to refer to and no place to rest.
Illuminated emptiness.

A feeling of peace and quietness
That does not arise.
Eternal;
A broad, vast liberation.
It is anything,
Always a harmony,
Wisdom is its everlasting sun,
A bright extinction.

Things can be explained
But don't make the mistakes of fictionalising
As the human mind loves to do
In its own manufactured terms.
Instead,
Close your eyes,
Rest in emptiness.
The most pleasant way,
The most peaceful nature,
Is in things as they are;
Without doing,
Without attaining,
Without “Self”.
Arising and not-arising always exist,
But here the wise know:
There is nothing that can possibly be explained.

INSCRIPTION TWO

The Way that is over all isn't difficult
Provided there is no picking and choosing.
Freed from love and hate,
There will be revelation and understanding.
Yet even a hair's breadth
Sets heaven and earth apart;
If you want the Way to appear
Have no fixed thoughts for or against.
Liking this and disliking that, for and against,
Is the disease of the mind.
Without understanding the mystery of the Way,
Peace of mind is disturbed for nothing.
The Way is complete, like great space,
Nothing lacking and nothing superfluous.
Discriminating and choosing,
You lose sight of its nature.

Don't get tied up in entangling appearances;
Don't dwell in the contextless void;
In the peaceful oneness
Confusing dualisms vanish by themselves.
Striving to gain peace by stopping activity,
Makes that peace ever more active.
Stuck in the duality,
How can you realise oneness?

Failing to understand the oneness,
Leads to a double loss;
Banishing existence only asserts it,
Asserting emptiness only denies it.
Words and intellect,
Lead us further from the Way;
Cut these out
And we can pass freely everywhere.

It is at the root that we gain the meaning;
Pursuing externals fails to illuminate.
To be enlightened within,
Is to go beyond the void-world confronting us.
Transformations in the void-world
Appear real because of ignorance.
Not seeking the real,
Just extinguish your opinions.

Avoid dualistic views,
Be careful not to pursue them.
Right and Wrong scatters the mind

And it is lost.
Two comes from one,
But don't even keep the one.
A mind undisturbed
Leads to all things offering no offence.
No offence offered and no "all things",
No disturbance and no mind,
Subject extinguished with object,
Object extinguished with the subject.
Object is the object of the subject;
Subject the subject of the object;
Experience the relativity of the two
Resting ultimately on one Emptiness.

In one Emptiness two become one,
Each in itself all things;
Without discrimination of this and that
How can prejudice arise?
The Great Way is calm and broad,
Nothing is easy for it and nothing difficult,
With narrow views and doubts,
Haste will slow you down.

Attachment never works out appropriately,
Mind takes a deviant path;
In spontaneity things follow their own courses,
Neither departing nor abiding.
According with nature, you are in concord with the Way,
Wandering calmly, free from vexation.
But when thoughts are tied up you depart from reality,
Its as bad as sinking into a stupor.

With unsound thoughts, the spirit is troubled;
Then what use is partiality and one-sidedness?
If you want to walk the way of the one path
Don't be put off by the senses.
With no aversion to the senses,
You become one with enlightenment;
Wise non-action is not bound up;
Cosmic law and order does not divide.
The greatest contradiction
Is attachment and creating illusive fictions.

Ignorance cherishes rest and unrest, tranquillity and confusion,
But the awakened have no likes and dislikes.
Dualisms are false discriminations,
Products of ignorance in action.

Like visions or illusions,
Why should we reach for them?
Gain and loss, right and wrong,
Get lost!

If eyes do not close,
Dreaming will cease.
If minds don't discriminate,
Cosmic order remains one suchness.
The deep mystery of this suchness is profound,
So we forget the external entanglements;
Viewed as their oneness,
We return to the origin, things as they are.
Beyond the subjectivity of "wheretoforeness"
There is no measuring and comparing.
Activity stopped, there is no rest,
If there is not two, there cannot be one.
The end is not a place of rules and standards,
A harmonious mind ends striving and finds peace,
Deeds are put to rest, anxious doubts are cleared,
Right faith is strengthened;
Nothing left,
Nothing retained;
Void,
Lucid,
Self-illuminating;
No exertion,
No waste of energy:
A place where thinking never attains,
A mode where thinking does not measure.

In the cosmic realm of true suchness,
There is no "self" and no "other":
According with this,
We say only "not-two".
In not-two there is unity,
All is comprehended in it;
The wise from all corners of the earth
Enter into this principle.

This principle is beyond time and space,
An instant is ten thousand years.
It doesn't matter that you can't see it,
It is everywhere and nowhere!
Small and large are the same
Without boundaries and conditions;
Large and small are the same

Without abiding delusions.
Existence as emptiness,
Emptiness as existence;
Where this is not the case
Don't hang around!
One in All,
All in One;
To realise this
Is not to worry about perfection.
Faith and mind are not-two,
Not-two is faith in mind.
Here words fail,
Without past, present or future.

INSCRIPTION THREE

Before the body,
There was energy;
A transformation of the Way,
Yin and Yang.
Continuously on the brink of existence,
Applying it without force,
The ocean of birth and death held firm
In the Awakened Awareness of a middle way.
Something uncontrived
Becomes temporal,
Sounds are heard,
Words take over.
Senses and physicality
Take their toll;
Nourished body and nourished mind:
Turn around.
Breathing,
A frozen spirit of living energy;
Don't get stuck
And energy returns.
Going and returning,
Cycles,
Rain and thunder
From top to bottom.
Perfect stillness producing movement,
Yin and Yang mold each other.
Energy births energy,
A world of transformation.

See movement in the stillness,
Following and reversing.
When the journey is over,
You return back home.

Spirit;
Energy;
Nature clear as water,
Mind still as a mountain;
Tuning the breath,
Stabilising the spirit;
Daily increasing,
Rejuvenation.

Being rid of illusions
Aids formation,
Subtle, breathing true.
Creation as true openness,
The awareness of the Way.
Energy returning,
Spirit forgetting:
Quietude going back to life.

Stillness,
Activity;
Movement,
Quietude;
Ascending and descending
In stability;
A quiet concentration.
A biorhythm.

A mystery in process,
Forming like dew;
Life stabilised,
Refining the body:
Spirit,
Energy,
Feeding,
Flight.

Origins beyond birth,
Enter one day;
A vessel created,
As gentle as an infant caressed.
Something from nothing,
Heaven's portals opened wide;
Wash yourself clean,

While thunder from the mountain shakes the earth.
The forge of the Way makes mountains and rivers:
The potential of creation;
Energy of sun,
Vitality of moon.
Where an elixir is produced
The body naturally lightens;
Where original spirit comes and goes
Apertures emit radiant light.

Feeding on living energy,
A state of clear coolness;
Forgetting appearances,
Merging with the Ultimate.
Natural rhythms,
Night and day;
Existing in balance
With all things.
Facing a wall,
Nine years as a single day,
The light body rides on violet energy,
Tranquil nature washing in a pure pond.
Energy unified, yin and yang as one,
Spirit the same as the universe.
Rising and falling,
A whistle in the wind.

A body outside the body,
Real, not magic,
Pervasive energy,
Original spirit.
As bright moon melts liquid gold,
The refinement of elemental reality;
A process,
A pearl.

Out of the valley,
Into the firmament,
The wings of the wind,
A supporting energy.
Amidst the flowers,
Under the moon.
Mortal, immortal,
Across the ocean.

Simplicity, The Most Subversive Thing in the World

There is a story told about Diogenes of Sinope that goes something like this: Diogenes was one day eating a meagre repast of dry bread and lentils for supper when he caught the eye of Aristippus, a philosopher who lived comfortably due to his flattery of the king, something which found him favour in the king's eyes. Aristippus, feeling bold seeing Diogenes eating such a poor meal, said to him, "If only you would learn to be subservient to the king you would not have to eat such lowly meals." Whereupon Diogenes, hearing the remark, replied, "It is because I have learned to live on lentils that I do not have to be subservient to the king."

Then there is the following quotation from the Tao Te Ching :

"Manifest plainness,
Embrace simplicity,
Reduce selfishness,
Have few desires."

This is offered as general advice on how to go about the practice of one's life and so is in much the same vein as Diogenes' acerbic riposte to Aristippus.

Meanwhile, if we should take the time to read Henry David Thoreau's memoir of spending over two years living alone in the woods by Walden lake in his book *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* , we find him espousing thoughts such as

"Cultivate poverty like a garden herb, like sage. Do not trouble yourself much to get new things, whether clothes or friends. Turn the old; return to them. Things do not change; we change. Sell your clothes and keep your thoughts. God will see that you do not want society."

"It is desirable that a man live in all respects so simply and preparedly that if an enemy take the town... he can walk out the gate empty-handed and without anxiety."

"Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself."

"Our life is frittered away by detail. Simplify, simplify."

And last but not least

"Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumbnail. In the midst of this chopping sea of civilized life, such are the clouds and storms and quicksands and thousand-and-one items to be allowed for, that a man has to live."

This essay is to be about simplicity, something that, it seems to me, has become something very subversive in all those parts of the world touched by wealth, civilisation, technology, acquisitiveness, banks, hoarding, capitalism, popularity [for what is more popular than "Look what I've got!"]?, keeping up with the Joneses and taking pride in things you claim to own. I regard ALL of

these things as vain and unnecessary but then I am also one who reads books that contain rural, agrarian, Daoist idylls and who looks on approvingly, seeing in such simplicity the pattern of a near perfect life. It is something Thoreau would have recognised since it is what he enjoyed for over two years in the woods by Walden lake. Alone. It is also very similar to Diogenes' solitary wandering around Athens and, later, Corinth. Diogenes, of course, had no home and so he found shelter and food, life's basic necessities, where he could. He seems to have been unashamed to beg as well. We do not find him worrying about where the next meal comes from or where he will spend the night. We do not find him concerned for his long term future as we do many in today's supposedly ever progressive world of property, stocks and shares, bank accounts, pensions and the like. Indeed, in a claim that cuts straight to the heart of such matters, Diogenes claims to be looking for a human being, something the civilised denizens of the cities of his acquaintance seem not to be in his eyes, and so, we must assume, he must be claiming, in some sense, to be modelling this in his own, simple hobo existence. Traditional Cynic garb was just a cloak. Possessions may have amounted to a simple bag and a staff. That's it.

By now most of any readers this particular essay has garnered will imagine me to be nuts as this essay seems to be suggesting we ditch modern civilisation and embrace the unforgiving harshness of pre-industrial times. Just think: no cars, no trains, no planes; no TV, no Internet, no computers; no health care [that's a big one!], no supermarkets, no public utilities. I'm not just nuts, I'm criminally dangerous, right? If I am its only because now, you having all these things, you can no longer imagine life without them. Yet have you ever asked after the cost of having these things in place [I'm not talking about money] in both relevant senses? Contemporary people are taught to expect these things as rights whilst simultaneously not being taught to question where they come from in terms of work, in terms of resources or in terms of the ongoing cost to the environment of having them [and the million other things I could have added to this list]. Even these nine things did not just drop out of the consequenceless sky as things which leave no footprint and have no effects themselves. It is not as if, having these things, they do not make us certain kinds of people, the kinds of people who think, above all else, that life is impossible without them.

But, of course, life is not impossible without them. Its just a different kind of life. Its a life that doesn't rely on financial gambling, being in debt or relying on some vast commercial enterprise to supply you with everything that comes into your tiny mind that has been taught to want this, that and every other thing that is advertised on TV and in your social media feeds. You want something, so why shouldn't you have it, you think to yourself, not imagining for a second the global consequences of billions of people all wanting things at the same time in a never ending stream of wants. But it has to be this way, doesn't it? Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon, would certainly like you to think so. He makes over \$8.9 million per HOUR, so I read, from making sure as many of your wants as possible can be satisfied within hours. Apparently, his company's carbon footprint is worthy of disgrace, what with all it takes to create such vast supply and delivery chains. But he is doing what must be done to fulfill a very modern mantra: consume, desire, want more! Yet it is impossible to discuss simplicity without questioning this mantra. We are each of us born with relatively simple needs. My Cynic and Daoist examples in this project knew this very well for, in text but also sometimes in historical practice, they eulogise them and take them up. Its a fair bet that if many of us alive today were sent back to their time we would find even living like their kings and emperors an intolerable situation, what with their lack of things we take for granted, things like electricity, powered transport, and ability to

message people instantly. Yet, to my examples, the civilised way these kings and emperors live is something to be despised and avoided — certainly for the Cynics. For Daoists it is merely wise and virtuous to avoid it. But what does this then say about us who, even in the regular versions of a civilised human being, have things past kings and emperors could never have dreamed of? Yet the important thing here, from the point of view of simplicity, is not who has what or what it is worth: It is what kind of person you are and what you have and how you live your life shapes what and who you are. This, in fact, has been my whole argument all along in relation to anarchy and anarchism. This is why, even earlier in this book, I have made the claim that civilisation, anarchy and anarchism are not compatible. They tend in different directions.

One way they are different, I think, is in their focus. Civilisation tends to focus on the community picture. It wants to establish a pattern and have people as a group conform to its ways. If we all want the same things and hold the same values, civilised values, than half of civilisation's job is already done. And, don't forget, this net of civilisation needs to be spread as wide as possible. The problem here, however, is that civilisation, as well as things which create it, such as money and an economic system, is a social fiction. Civilisation doesn't really exist but it is a name we give to large groups of people sharing similar ways of life or the metropolitan places where such "civilised" people live. It survives by educating those it gives birth to into its ways so that they come to accept them as normal and natural with their mother's milk. Civilisation, of course, is neither of these things. Its only as normal as any other way of life you could imagine going on on a continuing basis and its only as natural as learning to do things and make them so is natural. In this respect, what we call natural is entangled in human cultural "advancement" — if you imagine it is an advancement. In this respect, for example, the human built environment becomes natural as human cultures learn how to build in different ways but what is now natural to us would not have been to those of the past who could never have imagined to build such things as we can. This is essentially the conundrum of asking if anything a human being can do and achieve is natural because we are still essentially clever animals. Civilisation tells us that anything human culture can achieve is good, desirable and progressive. It tells us that wanting to not progress is a moral failing. It tells us we can change nature and make it our own. It tells us human culture can control where our environment goes and can be used to make our lives better, longer and more enjoyable, something uniquely in civilisation's gift.

Contrast with all this simplicity. This usually takes place at the personal level and this makes it suspect from a civilised perspective from the off. The person who wants to live a simple life stands out from the crowd and has done so for over 2,000 years already. The person wanting to live a simple life likely rejects the notion of civilised progress and looks beneath the shiny things it produces to fascinate easily distracted minds to ask what values such civilised life is built on. Simplicity is not about social fictions such as civilisation or money. It sees them merely as means to rather dubious ends and with a host of deleterious effects. Simplicity is an approach to life which asks what life is for, how one should go about it and what is best in what it has to offer. Simplicity asks what the consequences of living life in certain ways are and regards them as important considerations in living life a certain way at all. Simplicity is not about fanning the flames of desire as civilisation is. It does not tell you to want more and more. In fact, it tells you to want as little as possible. It does not tell you to expect or demand. It does not say you have rights, things which can then be turned into desires civilisation can provide for. It tells you to be joyful at having enough, to be happy with the satisfaction of your most basic needs which are the only needs you really have at all. Simplicity tells you that so much of modern life, as indeed

of civilised life since it began becoming civilised, is burden and complexity which will rob you of a connection to your animal and biological roots in nature and will turn you into a being which thinks itself above the world in which such life is set. Simplicity is about living life as you are, as the human being you were born as, whereas civilisation encourages you out of that and into a way of living it has created of itself by means of an ever-growing list of social fictions which make life ever more complicated and subject to non-empirical human inventions. Simplicity is the peaceful satisfaction of life's basic needs in harmony, as far as possible, with the world around you without any pretension or illusion where civilisation is the active disruption of the world in order to remake it in a created image.

Simplicity, then, is about the kind of person you are, what values you have, what you want from the life you have been cast into by your birth. Civilisation is about that too but it isn't nearly so interested, it seems to me, in focusing on that. Instead, it would rather, by osmosis and subterfuge, mold you into the sort of person who accepts what it accepts, values what it values and wants what it wants. And what civilisation wants, not least of all, is to make people who want to reject its values and live simply seem odd and strange. Civilisation, and its products, the civilised, don't like to be challenged. They don't want to hear that there might be other ways to live and other values to hold. Civilised languages have even developed in such a way that "uncivilised" comes to mean base and backward, lacking in the appropriate qualities and etiquette for living the kind of life "we" should expect to live as "the civilised". Civilisation does not want to be told that human progress, which is as Diogenes saw it, is in seeing what you can do without. Civilisation is not interested in being told, as simplicity is, that life is about the development of individual human character. Civilisation does not want to know that a machine life governed by machines will inevitably breed machine hearts and machine minds that satisfy only machine impulses. Civilisation breaks the simple human link with nature because it dreams of being in charge of it. Civilisation wants to remake and replace the world — something which has the added benefit of justifying its own unnecessary existence — whereas simplicity wishes only to live in peaceful communion with it. Civilisation is hubris where simplicity is an appropriate humility, a recognition of that which is beyond human beings and of which they are merely a part.

Simplicity is in realising that the less wants you have, the simpler — and more sustainable — things become. Why, in Daoist idylls, did "the people of old" live peaceful, agrarian lives? Because these are simple and so sustainable. Why is the Daoist mentality that of "actionless action", a letting things be as they will be, a flexibility to all circumstances? Why is its observation that the things which bend will not break and so, consequently, that those things which set up artificial wants and needs, which harbour desires and intentions, will inevitably court conflict, distress and trouble? Daoists and Zen Buddhists, it seems to me, both seek a peaceful enlightenment as the basis of their philosophies. The Cynics, at least those in a Diogenean mold, thought that living according to nature made you more human where being what you actually are is the thing to be. For none of these people did this involve anything very much beyond the self and the satisfaction of the basic needs which keep each one of us alive. Simplicity was at the heart of their creeds and daily routines. Their example was that in each personal example of simplicity the peace in each human life was increased and the human family as a whole lived more peacefully with the environment that supported both it and all the other things on the earth — including other people. It is, I think, primarily because of civilisation and its need to push itself forward as the only right thinking way to live that we now think such ideas quaint, naive and utopian. But there was a

time, not so long ago, when most people lived like that. They didn't know any better, you will say, and they were better off for it, I will reply.

Civilisation, in this respect, goes hand in hand with the mentality that knowing more and being able to do more is "better". But, I ask you in all seriousness, by what measure? Human beings only have basic needs and they still have the same needs now as they had before civilisation came. Before civilisation came, believe it or not, those exact same needs were also satisfied. A modern, technological civilisation was not required to satisfy them but civilisation will never tell you that. Civilisation will never tell you, as anti-civilisationist Daoist texts do, that in the past people were quite happy living out their mundane lives of peace and quiet never going beyond the boundaries of their village. Civilisation will tell of all the places you should be going to to be accounted a civilised human being and a participant in civilised society. It might not tell you the cost though and there is always a cost. Could uncivilised Man have ever threatened the planet with nuclear devastation or ecological collapse? No. A civilised human race has managed to place its ecosystem on the brink of destruction in only a couple of millennia. Even if you thought civilisation desirable no one can now argue it is without consequence. My argument is that simplicity is not only personally more fulfilling; it is infinitely better for the whole.

Here I must point out that it is specifically civilisation that is the problem and not something like capitalism or consumerism. These latter two are parasitic upon civilisation and rely on its centralising tendency, something they can both exploit. Capitalist and consumerist societies are ones which are highly centralised and integrated, all the better to control a lot with a little. If there were no civilisation, there would not be either capitalism or consumerism, so necessary is the centralising which civilisation makes real by drawing people in to share access to common resources. Think about it; if a rural and agrarian population was made up of those who each lived scattered about where they may, in tiny, self-supporting groups, how could either capitalism or consumerism exist? To live in that way also massively affects what you want or need to propagate such a form of life. Much of the impetus and desire to want, to consume, to acquire, disappears when your daily needs are met in much simpler and more self-supporting ways. You realise that what you are told you want now in modern civilisation from every conceivable angle is a lie, an illusion, a bad dream. It is civilisation itself, the aggregation of people into ever larger groups with ever more centralised means of utilising and supplying these groups, which lays the groundwork for even greater evils to grow in its fabricated soil. Decentralise the people, however, simplify their lives, disperse their needs – uncivilise them – and capitalism and consumerism disappear like a mirage in the desert.

This book is latterly being written under the spectre of the Covid-19 virus pandemic that has spread around the globe from late 2019 into 2020. It has, in a great many ways, shone a light on the way civilisation works and highlighted many dark corners of human society. It has shown that human needs are simple – food, clothing, shelter, networks of human support and mutual aid – as well as the acquisitiveness involved in making these basic needs, which every human being has, something that is only available for the social fiction of money which serves an equally fictitious economic system which designates rich and poor. This system, in turn, says what you can and can't do in human society judged by such measures. Yet, at the same time, this same situation has shown up how vast the inequalities are within this system, something which the system itself seems designed to create and facilitate. There cannot be a rich person unless there be many more poor ones. There cannot be a have without thousands of have nots. It cannot be that, in this system, the very means of human survival comes with a price tag attached, retailed

by people who claim the right to own things and so sell them, unless the mass of the population at large are coerced to buy into the games and practices of civilisation itself. It is not only The Matrix that has chosen to see such a human civilisation as itself the actual virus. What Covid-19 is revealing in a million acts of mutual aid and human kindness, however, is that things can, even now, always be a lot simpler than the unnecessary and often discriminatory and unequal practices of an unnecessary civilisation. And, indeed, one must ask at such a time:

“If the way things are [civilisation] works against the best interests of millions of people, then isn't it high time to change the way things are?”

This, however, is to attack civilisation on its own “macro” turf whereas simplicity exists in the tiny “micro” details. Simplicity is being concerned with yourself, your own life, the simple satisfaction of simple needs which, when multiplied, becomes the peaceful, authentic life of all. It is, I believe, at the heart of, and the basis of, the anarchism of those who, in the 19th century, created something which is today known as the political form of anarchism. But such simplicity as I here refer to never has a state of anarchism in mind. It is never simplicity's intention. It is not politicised as the motivations of the 19th century anarchists were. It is rather what simplicity creates if left simple, naive, innocent. Simplicity is not knowing but, sadly, knowingness can infect even things which start out from the best of motives. A knowing anarchism or a socialist civilisation are not simplicity for simplicity, much as the Dao in Daoism, has no intentions. It is not concerned with how things will turn out in the long run as a result of human action. It is whole and complete within itself like the Zen attitude which says that after meditation you should chop wood and carry water. The point there is to just go about your own peaceful business neither having excessive desires nor seeking to interfere into other things. Just live your life in whatever simple, peaceful harmony is possible and things will go about their way, preserving and prolonging life, in the way they always have done. Nature itself is simplicity in exactly this sense.

So simplicity is keeping in mind John Cage's oft-repeated statement regarding human action: “you can only make things worse”; and acting accordingly.

Tilopa's Anarchy

These are some of the associated ideas credited to Tilopa, an Indian Buddhist monk who stood in the line of Tibetan Buddhism and lived by the River Ganges from 988–1069 CE:

“Let go of what has passed. Let go of what may come. Let go of what is happening now. Don't try to figure anything out. Don't try to make anything happen. Relax, right now, and rest.”

“Stop all physical activity and sit naturally at ease. Remain silent and let sound be like an echo. Do not think about anything – look at experience beyond thought, open-minded like space. Let go of control and stop and rest at ease in that state. Awareness without projection is the greatest meditation. Train and develop like this and you will come to the deepest awakening.”

“The appearances of the world are not the problem, it's clinging to them that causes suffering.”

“Obsessive use of meditative disciplines or perennial study of scripture and philosophy will never bring forth this wonderful realization, this truth which is natural to awareness, because the mind that desperately desires to reach another realm or level of experience inadvertently ignores the basic light that constitutes all experience.”

“No thought, no reflection, no analysis, no cultivation, no intention; let it settle itself.” “It's not the appearance that binds you, it's the attachment to the appearance that binds you.”

“It is not the outer objects that entangle us. It is the inner clinging that entangles us.”

“Realize that nothing can last, that all is as dreamlike illusion.”

“Cut the mind at its root and rest in naked awareness.”

“One torch can dissipate the accumulated darkness of a thousand aeons.”

“Let go of what has passed; Let go of what may come; Let go of what is happening now; Don;t try to figure anything out; Don;t try to make anything happen; Relax, right now, and rest.”

“The problem is not enjoyment; the problem is attachment.”

There are a few entwined themes here in what I am choosing to see as thoughts which recommend a mental attitude and discipline [a self training if you like] that tend in a common direction.

- non-attachment
- the value of uncoerced mind
- the constant danger of illusion
- that you need nothing to be aware and awake
- to live in an ever-present

Frankly speaking, I do not know if these are “anarchist” values but I know they are not capitalist values and they seem not to be the values of “Western Civilization” either and so, as far as I'm concerned, we're off to a good start. What I see in Tilopa's words, in fact, is a therapeutic quality which protects us from the harshness and deliberate oppression of these things and I

judge that something that helps must be something good. We live in a world full of noise where we are constantly being advertised at, told what to think, accosted with views and opinions we are told must matter to us, on a 24 hour a day basis. If you turn on the TV or look at your phone, a near ubiquitous experience for many in the richer countries of the world, you will find it nigh on impossible to escape such things. But this book isn't being written to say, "Modern life is great, let's have more of it but without the authoritarian bits" because your author knows that this idea is a stupid child's fantasy, the invention of a person who has never given any thought to what they are saying. Our world is like it is because that is what the people who have made it are like. Those who see through this, realise its destructiveness and harm, and want to do something about it know that we must become people with other values and who live different lives if we really want anything to change.

What Tilopa offers, in this respect, is a chance at personal enlightenment. It is that enlightenment which comes when you unplug yourself from the matrix and stop force feeding yourself what Rupert Murdoch or the BBC or CNN or Pravda or your nightly news or talk radio or the newspapers or Twitter or Facebook or online pop culture sites want you to consume. Shit in, shit out. Tilopa offers you an oasis of calm unsullied by anything else. He offers you literally NOTHING and he counsels you as to the dangers of taking any of the myriad stories you will be accosted with every day as "reality" or "the truth". Tilopa would like you alert and awake, just as you are, as one who sees stories [illusions] for what they are and, consequently, SEES THROUGH THEM. So he counsels actively detaching yourself from such things, he asks you to realise that "reality" is everything that is going on right now – yet not under anybody's story about it but just as it is, unvarnished, story-free. Tilopa wants you to free yourself from the mind that is always thinking, wanting to connect this to that and make some speculative or projective narrative out of it. He wants you to let things settle themselves. He sees the value in a peaceful lack of coercion or the desire to always jump in and give phenomena or events a meaning. That's what cable news talking heads do when story after story is promoted in the service of agenda after agenda. What sort of world has that given us? A thoroughly partisan one of haves and have nots. "Enlightened" is not a word anyone would attach to that.

It is a Buddhist verity that everything you need to become enlightened you already have, just as you are. It doesn't take special knowledge and it is not the gaining of anything for, actually and counter-intuitively, the Buddhist, such as Tilopa, sees the problem not in that we need to get something we haven't got but that we need to lose things we have picked up. Enlightenment is losing all the attachments of life so that we can see more clearly and without distraction. This does not mean doing nothing and sitting in a corner. People still have to live. It means the attitude of "non-attachment" that Tilopa counsels. This seems to say that we should go about our lives with a lightness of feet and not get dragged off course into agendas and partisanship and debates but always retain a clear-headedness which resists being co-opted, a self-centred [but not selfish] desire to keep our minds free of clutter and the effluvia that any number of commercial and political actors would just love to fill our heads with if they could. So this is actually about a constant mental awareness, a mental hygiene, a pro-active attention to what promotes or degrades mental health. Any number of people pollute their minds on a daily basis just because they are doing what is "normal" but without giving it a second thought. Mental hygiene and mental health, however, are achievements and things we can do something about, or not, at our discretion. We should not rest content to be the mentally abused people our imagined political

and corporate masters would hope us to be, tame sheep who graze as requested all the better to be exploited by them.

In my own life I have always found it beneficial to have period of total silence where I deliberately concentrate my mind on not thinking at all. Call it a deep mind cleanse if you like. It is genuinely refreshing in a world where you are being crammed with information all the time. I can testify it benefits mental and spiritual health and gives you renewed focus on what matters and what doesn't. It aids you in seeing the constant rhetoric, political and otherwise, for exactly what it is: unimportant. What could be more important to you than your own mental health? You don't need to subject yourself to the abuse every day and you can take steps to help yourself. That is what I see Tilopa as doing. It is the anarchy of refusing to be a normie and actively taking responsibility for your own mind and its peace. In addition to this, it is a necessary step in the necessary activity of deprogramming yourself from the societal and civilizational values you have been programmed with your whole life by parents, teachers, bosses, friends, enemies, media, politics and all other sources. A constant refrain of mine is that we must reprogramme our minds if we want to activate ourselves in new, anarchistic ways which do not operate in the same ways, or with the same goals, as the capitalist and liberal politics of the world we live in today. An anarchist, I suggest, is not just another member of capitalist society but the seed of new possibilities in which life may happen in new ways to wider human benefit. That can never happen, however, if each of us is just another capitalist drone, even if we are one who sees the prison bars that are keeping us locked in the capitalist prison. We have to take control of our minds and empty them of society's rubbish and society's values. Tilopa sets us off down that path by offering us NOTHING. And you should learn to appreciate it!

Epilogue

Many hundreds of pages, and four books, ago, when I set out on writing something I had called *There is Nothing to Stick to* — after something the Buddha was reported to have said — I had no idea that what I was writing was a book, soon to become a series of books, about anarchy and anarchism. As can be seen from the subtitle of that first book — *Every Step is On The Path* — I was, back then, compiling an anthology of views and thoughts which, somehow taken together, came to be indicative of an attitude, an approach, an interpretation. Perhaps this was towards or about life but it wasn't yet entirely clear in my writerly head as I will quite willingly admit. In that first book, which interacted with at least one genuine anarchist in the form of Emma Goldman, I was hitting upon text, thoughts and approaches which were anti-authoritarian whilst being holistic; they took account of everything whilst maintaining that there was nothing in that whole with the authority to compel us to things. This was true in spiritual, philosophical, political and existential ways.

At the start, at least, I was very keen not to present the material as some kind of authority itself. It was, I hope all the way through all four of the books I ended up writing, and remains material for a reader's consideration and own self-education rather than a statute or an imperative. In later books, books which described and collated the thoughts of others and sometimes added in my own opinions about things, this would change from simple reproduction of others' views and be mixed in with things that took up a stance of my own. It is and remains the case that thinking people, and not only unthinking ones, will always have opinions. My process in these books has largely been focused on presenting multiple views on the matters with which I was concerned and then leaving it to people to make up their own minds. This, it seems to me, enshrines at least two beliefs in such a practice: first, that of having beliefs about a subject and doing the hard work of studying and presenting them as fully as necessary and, secondly, having a fundamental belief that people are responsible for their own thoughts and beliefs, something to be regarded as an essentially personal process and practice in itself.

From the very first section of the very first book, which was a cut down presentation of the Tao Te Ching I have repeated in this book as well, I have thought of “nothing to stick to”, the “anti-authoritarian and holistic” project I was embarking on, as a spiritual topic. “Spiritual” is a word that scares some people, perhaps people who imagine it is tainted by association to organised religion or to something opposed to science with its intimation of immateriality. But, if you read all four of the books I subsequently wrote, who could say any of them contained any organised religion? I regard the association of spirituality with religion in the context of the books I have written and the mentality informing them as completely unfounded. When it comes to the matter of an unscientific immaterialism its a bit more complicated. Science itself posits the existence of things for which it can give no material “look its there you can see it and touch it” evidence. What else, for example, is “dark matter”, matter that is “implied” or “posited” even though, in physical theories of the universe, it is said to make up about 85% of ALL the matter scientists claim to need to make sense of how they understand the universe? To be clear, I'm not saying that dark

matter doesn't exist. I am saying there is more to the universe than things you can see and touch. Indeed, it would be a very strange universe that conformed entirely to the sense capabilities of one lifeform on one planet in the midst of its vastness. Religionists of a few hundred years ago claimed earth as the centre of creation due to their sense of self-importance and this would be a scientific version of exactly the same anthropocentrism.

So one thing I am claiming in this project being openly spiritual from the start is that it is not simply a matter of humans understanding things or humans name-tagging everything in the universe, codifying it, and then, at the end, when all this activity is done, claiming to have understood it. All the way through this project, in fact, I have claimed that human beings are not the measure, that the universe is beyond them and that the whole I was talking about, be that life, existence or something else, was a mystery. This is not a willed mystery but a self-realisation, an appropriate humility, a recognition that human narratives are not canonical and that human understanding is not authoritative or infallible. Period. If it is true that I came here with anti-authoritarian and holistic beliefs and intuitions, it is also true that as I went through the material that crossed my path as I was doing this, material from disparate and not obviously connected [and sometimes antagonistic] sources, I came to see a philosophical side to this as well, a type of accumulated human wisdom [philosophy = wisdom] which leant what I was writing some philosophical credentials to boot.

It does not really matter what names were attached to this wisdom and how "famous" or "credible" they are today. The names were used only as recognisable tags to hang the thoughts upon in an appropriate way and to give means to further research and thinking for any readers. The content of the material is always the important thing, what something is saying, what it means and where it might lead. This was, as of first importance, then, a project of ideas for the furtherance of ideas and to be combatted, if it needs to be combatted, by yet other, better ideas. It was conducted in a tradition of philosophy as a matter of life and the appropriate living of that life, a very common understanding of philosophy in Hellenistic and pre-Hellenistic times among the Greeks and those they influenced. This was a matter of practicality perhaps before it was a matter of theory. Indeed, philosophically speaking, I have very little to say about theory and very few theories about life and existence and anarchy and anarchism, as this project came to be about. "Life as anarchy, existence as anarchism" might exhaust my theoretical interests, in fact. Much more have I been interested in "ways to live", their worth, meaning and consequences and this, it seems to me, is a collection of the proper interests of someone who, in the course of being led where their thoughts about life lead, realises that anarchy is not something we create but is something we are constantly becoming; it is not something we make but something that makes us. So, as I see it, the "spirituality and philosophy" of my project is covering the same ground as the anarchy and anarchism of those more politically motivated and contextualised even though politics is not my first love or one of my motivating interests. I would claim to have done some of the groundwork that motivates the political anarchism they are so in favour of – more often than not for very good political reasons. So I am not aiming to discount or disallow their versions of anarchism but, at the personal, spiritual and philosophical levels, to give extra reasons for it. We should be politically free because freedom is our spiritual and philosophical birthright, the very form and shape of our existence, an existence finally to be undifferentiated from that of all things.

I finish with a short poem I once wrote which, perhaps, sums this all up:

Something from Nothing.
Nothing from Something,
Ever Returning,
The Unending Dao.

With a Mind like the Seashore,
Devoid of Intention,
With Actionless Action,
We Flow like the Stream.

All Knowledge is Empty,
All Striving is Useless,
All Time is Deceiving,
All Separateness False.

Walk the Way of Humility,
Abide in Simplicity,
Be the child of Compassion,
Be at one with the Way.

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