

Articles

THE FRACTAL SELF AND THE ORGANIZATION OF NATURE: THE DAOIST SAGE AND CHAOS THEORY

by David Jones and John Culliney

Abstract. The interconnections between self and surroundings in Daoist thought have been explored in the past in a variety of contexts. This paper, however, explores the Daoist version of the relational self from the general perspective of chaos theory and, more specifically, examines the role of the self in creating emergent form and dynamism in nature and society. The fractal self and world merge through the disciplined effort of the sage until the effort becomes effortless. Both self and world are transformed and become one through the emergent moment. This moment represents a new opportunity for subsequent patterns, or attractors, to emerge. We suggest that the self folds itself into the world, creating and being created by a new attractor, or pattern, in the organization of nature, which we argue is *Dao*. Our current investigation addresses the following aspects of chaos theory and its relation to Daoism: (1) the Daoist notion of *wuwei* as perfect congruence; (2) *yin* and *yang* at the edge of chaos; (3) the emergent nature of the myriad things; and (4) a Daoist warning against fractal disconnections in the world. Finally, we conclude that the self has the potential to become the world. To approach this amplified condition, the self must dedicate itself to and risk open engagement with events across the complexity of nature. Through openly engaging the world, the self is transformed, leaving the world forever changed.

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Daoist thinkers have long understood how the systems of nature flourish and diminish and how patterns emerge from the various interactive components of the natural world. Daoists' knowledge of systems and how they function is a natural consequence of the general content of their philosophical approach. Their approach has always yielded a contextualized self, a self that realizes its being as a self through its integration with the other myriad creatures and things. The self in Daoism is relational; it is defined in relation to all other things. The relational self is inseparable from the larger structure of society, nature, and the universe. Consequently, the self of Daoism orients itself beyond itself to the world of other selves, and especially to the world of nature. Daoism does not give the human perspective a privileged position, as it is usually given in the Western intellectual tradition. Hence, perspective and the overcoming of the human-centered view are crucial for understanding the place and role of the human individual and the human species in the greater universe.

Relinquishing the human perspective for a larger, greater, and more holistic viewpoint, that is, the perspective of the system, has a validity and importance that science clearly recognizes in the modern era. Darwinian biology, quantum physics, chaos theory, and the science of complexity represent some of the best examples of this forfeiture of the anthropocentric, deity-directed view of the universe and the subsequent byproducts of this view. This view is primarily a Western one that sanctions a higher reality, a transcendent god, and an immortal soul. Ironically, chaos theory is a recent Western idea that moves away from this Western tradition. Chaos theory and its recent outgrowth, the science of complexity, focus on the self-organization, or self-creation, of systems, and their evolution. The subsequent, and logical, step to take from these approaches is one of inclusiveness and value, the participation of all elements and units in the structure and function of a system and the environmental value of the system's well-being, including potential for evolution. Daoism focused on these aspects of natural systems long before chaos theory did. Chaos theory and the science of complexity, however, open a new window on the holistic, participatory universe, and we discover a greater, even central, role of the self's participation in and shaping of the natural and social world.

Analyses of chaos and complexity provide us with a new language for interpreting and giving meaning to the worldview of Daoism. We suggest that the self in Daoism is a *fractal* self, one that potentially can seamlessly interweave its being with affinitive systems, or attractors in the world, whose organization is now recognized to transcend classic dimensionality. The so-called fractal organization of nature refers to an apparent universal geometry of form and process elucidated primarily by the mathematician

Benoit Mandelbrot in the 1960s and 1970s (Mandelbrot 1977). Although others had earlier glimpsed the fractal principle and discovered discrete examples of its application, Mandelbrot proved that intricate, repetitive patterns appear in the universe over a vast range of scale and that nature created structure in a continuum of seamless dimensionality. No longer could the world be accurately simplified by reference to linear coordinates and whole-number dimensions. For example, between a two-dimensional surface and three-dimensional space was an infinity of intermediate form, as evidenced in the structure of a sponge or a cloud.

We maintain that the seamless dimensionality in nature is *Dao*. Furthermore, the self is able to seek by inherent affinity and to attain by steadfast training a fractal congruence with nature or portions of nature. For the self, fractal congruence means a natural fit or perfected flair or fluency within an affinitive system—the particular portion of nature to which one is drawn.

WUWEI AS PERFECT CONGRUENCE

The sage as one “who does nothing and nothing is left undone” is one of the most perplexing characteristics of the self in Daoism. What are we to make of statements such as “the one who seeks to govern the world, and exerts himself in attempting to do it . . . will not attain his goal. The world is a spiritual entity—it cannot be grasped. Those who deliberately administer it spoil it, and those who grasp it lose it” (Ch'en 1977, 159)? When people act in this fashion, they do not act in a sagely way. The sage must “attain a state of ‘non-activity’ [*wuwei*],” and when the sage achieves this state “there is nothing which is not accomplished” (Ch'en 1977, 262). Although translating *wuwei* as nonactivity is accurate literally, this translation is somewhat misleading. Placing the term within the greater context of Daoist thought—its emphasis on the becoming of the world—we can better understand *wuwei* as natural, unconscious, or nondirected action within an antiteleological process model of the world. The sage effortlessly approaches, melds with, and becomes one with the flow of the world. The flow of the world (proceeding out of its seamless structure) is *Dao* in action. *Dao* itself is understood as *wuwei*: “Tao is [constantly] [*wuwei*],¹ and yet there is nothing which it does not do [and] if nobles and kings would only preserve it, the myriad things would be transformed of their accord” (Ch'en 1977, 186).

The emphasis of Daoist thinkers is on the natural qualities or characteristics of *Dao*. *Dao* happens, but its happenings move in subtle ways that appear to be without purpose. Traditionally, this process of *Dao* must be preserved by the *shengren*, the sage, who is also referred to as the *zhenren* (genuine person) and the *shenren*, the spiritual or daimonic person (Graham 1989, 101).² Paradoxically, this would seem to represent an intrusion into the natural flow of the world. However, in Daoist thought the sage is

considered to be fully immersed in the structure and flow of nature. This accords with the principle of self-organization in the science of complexity, because the process has its own sense, its own intelligence, in which the sage contributes significantly but does not stand outside the system. A process that generates pattern (order from chaos) within a system, or part of the world, proceeds as if there were a ghost in the machine, a spirit emerging from the interactions of the world's, or system's, integrated parts. This emerging spirit, or the tendency of nature to develop an integrating structure that directs its entire system, is *Dao*, or the way of the world: "The Tao constitutes the regulating structure of nature" (Ch'en 1977, 14). In keeping with chaos theory, we would say *Dao* constitutes self-regulation and self-organization.

The image of Cook Ding in the *Zhuangzi* never having to sharpen his chopper has become a popular metaphor for sagely action and systemic participation (Graham 1981, 63). Within the very humble system of a kitchen (perhaps chosen for its inconspicuousness), Cook Ding achieves perfect congruence with his art. He never experiences the need to sharpen his cleaver, because he "knows" where the bones, cartilage, and other obstacles to a clean cut lie. The fluidity of Cook Ding's (non)action is a result of his knowledge, which is the culmination of years of disciplined practice and the realization that he is embedded within the structure and process of his world, and one with its myriad creatures/things, and with *Dao* itself. His actions are fractally matched to the shape and flow of the world around him.

There are endless examples of *wuwei* that are similar to Cook Ding's expression of his art in the *Zhuangzi*: consider Rell Sunn, the expert surfer, who achieves perfect poise in a massive wall of moving water and fleetingly affirms and enlivens its form and power; Michael Jordan, whose mastery on the basketball court shapes the structure and focuses the energy of the game; Bill Clinton, the persuasive politician, who senses the psychological structure and mood of his audience and shapes the emotional content of his speech to match. Each in his own right is similar to Cook Ding, because each, like him, performs his action so skillfully and appropriately. The action appears to happen without effort because it is so fluid. The self, as sage, melds with the system.

As the earth moves, so does the sage. Cook Ding cuts the meat according to the placement of muscle and cartilage; Michael Jordan, in the zone, with his team flawlessly weaving their efforts with his, hits the fadeaway jump shot within the context of the game; and the surf sage shoots the wave's curl in perfect balance in the prolonged moment before the wave's break. The sage moves effortlessly and accomplishes his tasks with ease and assiduity because he has brought himself to an understanding of his world and its processes. Not only does he know the world, he realizes he is a part of it. It reflects him.

Within yourself, no fixed positions:
 Things as they take shape disclose themselves.
 Moving, be like water,
 Still, be like a mirror,
 Respond like an echo. (Graham 1981, 281)

THE SAGE AS BUTTERFLY (SELF-SHAPING OF THE WORLD)

This analysis suggests that the self is transformed through its connection to the forces of the world. Through affinity and training the self becomes the sage whose metamorphosis ultimately creates a participatory match within the structure of the affinitive system. This idea in itself is not revelatory, for others have also come to this conclusion. However, we extend our thesis to include the sage's impact on the world—how the world is transformed—through the sage's trained and disciplined, yet free-flowing, interaction with the world. The sage carves the uncarved block; the sage carves *Dao*, the possibility of emergent worlds and their immanent patternings.

In performing their activity, sages may appear to be doing nothing because they are so attuned to the natural patterns of their world. In reality, however, the sage as butterfly transforms the world by making the finer distinctions and discriminations appropriate to the flowing of *Dao*. As the sage achieves fractal integration with the system, the carcass becomes dinner worthy of a king, the game becomes a signature event that may be long remembered, and even the wave may become legendary, having met for a moment the participation of the sage. This vision is wholly antithetical to the concept of mastery over a system or of conquering nature. What happens, rather, is that at the moment of congruence, the master achieves participation from within rather than an effect from without. The surfer in the curl of the wave, the player in the zone of the game, the carver in the contours of meat or marble, all contribute a new identity to the system. Something new appears in the world. The participation of the self fractally alters the world and shifts its flow.

Thus, sages do more than just preserve the world; in some important way they metamorphose with their world; they effect certain changes in the fate of the meat, the flow of the game, or the breaking of the wave, and these changes make the world different in the future. Sages do not merely recover the lost innocence of childhood; they learn the power of discrimination, of when and how to act. The discriminations they make are the finer discriminations that craftspersons make in the service of their ends: the master chef, the quintessential player, the skilled politician, and so forth. Sages make the finer discriminations as they approach perfect congruence with the system in which they participate. This point seems to be contra A. C. Graham, who says that "the analogy of the craftsman has the limitation that the sage, instead of putting his unthinking dexterity in the

service of ends, is spontaneous from the very centre of his being" (Graham 1989, 191). Graham usually translates *ziran* as "spontaneous" or "spontaneity," which shows why he may make an assertion like the one he makes above. We find a potential resolution to this conflict. Rather than an end, there is the suggestion of a new beginning wrought spontaneously by the sage's manifestation of ultimate craftsmanship. In this light, if translated as "self-so-ing," or the spontaneous realization of one's dynamic essence, then *ziran* can lead to conclusions resonant with complexity theory's notion of emergence and universal evolution.

A central tenet of chaos theory is sensitive dependence on initial conditions, often called simply the butterfly effect. The classic example involves the local weather. In simulating weather patterns on supercomputers, meteorologists find that the slightest variation in a factor such as wind speed, temperature, humidity, or barometric pressure causes drastically different virtual weather patterns to emerge. This phenomenon was discovered in 1963 by the theoretical physicist Edward Lorenz (Gleick 1988, 23). His experiments overturned the reigning paradigm of weather forecasting, which held that small imbalances or disturbances in weather factors would always just damp out and disappear into a larger, long-term, predictable unfolding pattern. The discovery of sensitive dependence on initial conditions was named the sea gull effect, later changed to the butterfly effect to emphasize its extreme sensitivity. Very rarely, it may be true that a butterfly flapping its wings in Beijing may set off a tornado three days later in Hong Kong. Amplification of the tiny change in the system caused by the butterfly is possible if the butterfly becomes fractally congruent, or resonant, with the prevailing air currents at the scale of its wing beats, and then if the system remains seamlessly connected from small scale to large.

A simplified version of this phenomenon explored by the physicist Glenn Held might be called the sandpile effect (Waldrop 1992, 304). Potentially the addition or loss of a grain of sand may bring down a mountain. In experiments of beguiling simplicity, Held piled up sand to a threshold of instability. This is the point at which a single added grain, dropped on the apex of the pile, may trigger a partial collapse of the pile. In this situation, the initiating event looks the same every time; it seems to be a unit impact, but the potential result ranges across a wide magnitude. Mostly, of course, the consequence is a tiny slide of grains that slightly improves the pile's stability, but once in a while, the result of the impact is a large collapse. Between the extremes is a smooth curve that relates the size of the sand avalanche to the expected frequency; it follows a power law. Small sandslides are common; big ones are rare. The surprise is that they all can start with a single added grain when the pile is at the edge of its stability.

In the sandpile effect, the shock wave of each sand grain's impact, like the force imparted to the air by the insect's wings, has the potential to

propagate through the system, across its fractal spectrum of scale, to trigger a major change. Of course the weather embodies greater complexity than the sand, in the sense that there are more variables to provide a damping effect that may dissipate the changes set in motion by the butterfly before they go very far in any one direction. The sage's role in the system, like that of the butterfly and the sand grain, is to contribute potential complexity that participates in and may alter the world. If perfect fractal congruence is achieved, amplification of the sage's participation is potentially infinite. Usually, however, something in the real world/system breaks the seamless dimensionality, and the butterfly effect is obscured in minor realms of chaos.

In the context of the sage as butterfly, Zhuangzi, as A. C. Graham has remarked, is "interested not in the nature which a man inherits at birth but in the Power which he develops by intensive training" (Graham 1981, 16). In the text itself, Zhuangzi remarks: "By the training of our nature we recover the Power. When Power is at its utmost, we accord with the Beginning. In according we attenuate, in attenuating we become Great, and blend together the twitters of the beaks. When the twitters of the beaks blend, we are blended with Heaven and Earth" (Graham 1981, 156).

THE FLOW OF *DAO*: APPROACHING THE EDGE OF CHAOS

In complexity theory, self-organizing systems generate new interactions or connections among their units that may be as variable as atoms forming protein molecules or as people forming institutions and societies. In so doing, systems develop or evolve toward what has become known as the edge of chaos, a unique state of being in which a system functions at its highest level of dynamic activity while still maintaining its structure and integrity (Langton 1991, 35). The edge of chaos, also known as deterministic chaos, is a precarious realm, however. On one side lies deep chaos, in which functional order disappears in rampant entropy, randomness destroys a system's integrity, and its units, and perhaps the system itself, may be extinguished. On the other side is a region complexity theorists call the frozen realm. Here richness of connectivity diminishes, and a system retreats into stasis; order becomes rigid; dynamic flow or activity of the system's units ceases.

We find numerous textual references that suggest Daoist thinkers metaphorically visited these realms long ago, having become aware of fractal nature's shaping of the edge of chaos along what modern theorists refer to as the transition to turbulence. Perhaps nowhere is there a better model for the edge of chaos than at the interface of *yin* and *yang*.

Yin and *yang* are the two elements of *qi*. Through the interaction of *yin* and *yang*, order arises among the myriad things as they are blended in the world. The region where *yin* and *yang* meet is the precarious, dynamic

edge where the flow of *Dao* inexorably leads when the sage has achieved *wuwei*. The sage must learn to unlearn the duality of “this and that,” or “it and other,” and learn how to negotiate this edge within the wave’s curl, through the sinews of the meat, the patterns of the game, and so forth. If the sage’s will and assertion of power, dominance, and so forth, are too great, the system will either retreat into states of uncreativity, of lethargy for the system, or it will plummet to its chaotic demise. In Daoist thinking, societies will suffer these sorts of consequences if rulers do not understand that “the more restrictions and prohibitions in the empire, the deeper will the people sink into destitution” (Ch’en 1977, 250). Daoists point to the “most excellent [ruler]—the people do not know that he exists” (Ch’en 1977, 115). Thus, rulers or sages must gauge their presence and actions so as to fractally mesh with the flow of society.

The region where yin and yang meet is more fractally drawn than the way the *Taiji* symbol typically portrays it. Yang originally referred to sunshine and yin to shade. There is a detectable order to the process of shade overcoming sunshine and sunshine overcoming shade with respect to the valley between the northern and southern mountain slopes, the loci of yin and yang (Graham 1989, 325). In nature, this dividing line between yin and yang is a classic fractal border—the silhouette of tree branches and foliage or a canyon ridgeline. It is a dynamic line that changes constantly; this dividing line can never be simply circumscribed like the graphically portrayed curved line of the *Taiji* symbol.

EMERGENCE (THE POWER OF *DAO*)

The preservation of *Dao* as *wuwei*—the flow of *Dao*—is a decisive quality of the sage as butterfly. This quality is the product of training and discipline and must be learned. Beyond preservation of the flow, the sage’s participation in the system changes the flow—most often in a fleeting and infinitesimal way. But always there is the chance, owing to the fractal connectedness of the myriad elements of the system, that the sage’s actions may result in much more than a mere momentary change in the world.

The self of the sage seeks the heart of the system, such as the controlling forces of ocean or game—the essential elements that are nonself—and conjoins them, forming a new system. Through training, the self becomes fractally receptive or structurally and dynamically adept within the system, meaning that the self’s integration with the system reaches its highest level. To accomplish this adeptness the self must manifest an evolving attitude to selflessness—the merging of self and system.

It is generally understood that the sage is a repository, the conduit, or clear passage of the external *qi* of heaven and earth and can appropriate this *qi* at will. *Dao* flows through sages, giving them the power (*de*) of *wuwei*. Their *de* is also referred to in the tradition as the *qi* that flows through all things. In keeping with the model of self-organization in modern

thinking about complexity, we suggest that *qi* is a term for the organizing principle, the as-yet-unfathomed mechanism behind universal evolution. In this context, *de*, the power of *wuwei*, might be characterized as the power of complex systems to give rise to qualitatively new worlds in which the whole is more than the sum of the parts. In the lexicon of complexity, this generation of a new world is called *emergence*, and it is most likely to happen in systems that have evolved to the edge of chaos (Kauffman 1995, 90). Emergence seems to be clearly anticipated by Daoism. Zhuangzi says, “Now the fact that when you point out from each other the hundred parts of a horse you do not find the horse, yet there a horse is, tethered in front of you, is because you stand the hundred parts on another level to call them ‘horse’” (Graham 1981, 151).

Seeking balance through tension, systems might be viewed as evolving through *fan*, the circular movement of *Dao*, also translated as “turning back.” Two fundamental aspects of *fan* are the interplay of the opposites of yin and yang and the continuous returning of the myriad things back to their source. When a particular phenomenon increases and reaches its terminus, it necessarily changes direction and recedes toward its other side. This progression from opposites is not coercive; it is natural. Each particular (myriad) thing realizes its self-nature (*ziran*) through this process. The myriad things arise and are shaped by the interplay of the generative forces of yin and yang. Through shifting balances of these forces, the myriad things change their form. In other words, through the blending of the forces of yin and yang, the self-generating emergence of reality, of nature, occurs.

The behavior of complex systems may be described (or circumscribed) by patterns known as attractors. An attractor may be viewed as representing the system’s region of coherent existence (Gleick 1988, 233). Elements or units that are participants in a system interact within the often intricate geometry of the system’s attractor. Beyond the attractor of a given system is the nether space of deep chaos—a region of randomness in which the system loses its coherence and identity. The border of the attractor, however, is the system’s most dynamic region. This region is the edge of chaos. Along this edge, turbulence begins to appear in the behavior of the system’s units. Entering this transition to turbulence, elements of the system are pushed and pulled into near chaos, from which they may return to more predictable patterns safely within the attractor’s borders. Flirting with the edge of chaos, however, can be viewed as risky for a system, owing to the chance of disintegration into randomness and perhaps extinction.

New discoveries in nature and in computer simulations of complex systems suggest that the edge of chaos is also the prime locus for emergence, a change within the system that qualitatively alters overall behavior or sometimes even creates a new attractor (Kauffman 1995, 23). Emergence often appears as “transcendence.” The new pattern or entity that appears is more

than the sum of its formative parts or actions. Emergence often appears to bubble up from rather small regions of turbulence along the edge of chaos. We maintain that sages can be the focus of emergence in their affinitive system as it dwells along the edge of chaos. The sage alters nature by deftly participating in the emergent moment—by affecting and effecting the infinity of future form and pattern that opens up at the transition to turbulence. Sages know the world but change it in a caring and loving way. Through their fractal participation they promote the evolutionary well-being of the system.

Dao is characterized in the *Laozi* as expansive and reaching in all directions (chap. 34), circular (40), bent (45), easy to follow (53), shadowy and indistinct (21), nameless and uncarved (32), and empty and deep (4). These same attributes might readily be ascribed to a system's attractor and its border regions.

The "myriad things depend on [*Dao*] for their existence" (chap. 34), because *Dao* is "so expansive reaching in all directions" (34). Such expansiveness also includes the emergent potential of *Dao*—the incessant becoming of the world. The emphasis placed on *Dao* in the *Laozi* is one of process and conditioning. *Dao* "does not appropriate [the myriad things] . . . [but] . . . clothes and nourishes [them]" (Ch'en 1977, 177)—also perhaps a metaphor for emergence. *Dao* is not viewed as a realm where the sage seeks transcendence, because transcendence occurs within the process, nor is *Dao* regarded as some ontological substance. The process of *Dao* is discussed as one of circular movement; each of the myriad things is composed as various combinations of the constituent forces of yin and yang.

Circularity is the movement of Tao;
Weakness is the function of Tao.
The myriad things of the universe are engendered
from "Being" [*yu*, have, there is],
And 'Being' is in turn engendered from 'Non-Being'
[*wu*, have not, there is not]. (Ch'en 1977, 201)

The circularity and reversions between being and nonbeing, having and not-having, likewise evoke images of waves of emergence—new worlds bubbling up at the edge of chaos. According to the circular movement of *Dao*, or *fan*, the myriad things are capable of changing their forms to generate new emergent patterns in the world.

The myriad things shoulder the *yin* vapors
and embrace the *yang*
and through the [blending] of these vapors
[the generative forces of yin and yang]
They attain a state of harmony. (Ch'en 1977, 207)

The word for *blending* (our interpolation for coalescing) is *chong*. *Chong* has the vitality of gushing forth, a process that bespeaks emergence. This gushing forth is the emergent harmony (*he*), or order, which is possible only when there is yin and yang blending to form one (see Ch'en 1977, 208 n. 5, for further discussion). However, the harmonious order that emerges is not a static one; this new order is one that will transform continuously and mutate in immeasurable ways. This transformation in Chinese thought is called *Dahua*, the great transformation. Tu Wei-ming writes in his "The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature":

The organismic process as a spontaneously self-generating life process exhibits three basic motifs: continuity, wholeness, and dynamism. All modalities of being, from rock to heaven, are integral parts of a continuum. . . . To say that the cosmos is a continuum and that all its components are internally connected is also to say that it is an organismic unity, holistically integrated at each level of complexity. (Tu 1989, 70)

Self-organization appears to exist throughout the whole of nature. This continuum extends across the infinity of intermediate dimensions, according to Mandelbrot's fractal principle. It encompasses all that is between yin and yang.

Tu discusses this organismic spontaneously self-generating life process in terms of *qi*: "The continuous presence of *chi* [*qi*], the psychophysical stuff, is everywhere. . . . The continuous presence of *chi* in all modalities of being makes everything flow together as the unfolding of a single process. Nothing, not even an almighty creator, is external to this process" (Tu 1989, 70). Daoism's relationship to nature places humanity on the inside of the becoming of the self-contained and containing system we call the world; this relationship situates humanity in the nearness of the becoming of the universe. The self has the potential to unfold through its openness to an endless participation in the creativity of the universe. The sage represents a self who is fractally connected to the creative process and one who effects the generation of emerging new worlds.

"The Way comes about as we walk it" (Graham 1981, 53), that is, with human interaction and participation. Daoists have always realized the inexplicable magnificence of the universe, the world, and the amplitude of the human relation to the natural world. The *Laozi* discusses how "Tao is great; Heaven is great; Earth is great," and somewhat surprisingly adds that "man is also great." Each of these levels is fractally connected, because "Man emulates Earth; Earth emulates Heaven; Heaven emulates the Tao." *Dao* can emulate only itself, however, because "the Tao emulates that which is natural to it" (Ch'en 1977, 142). Its self-nature is just so. *Dao* just continues its self-so-ing, its engendering of universal evolution, with an occasional encouragement from the sage—who, on occasion, makes the great transformation from a butterfly to a god.

NOTES

1. Our interpolations for “eternally” and for “nonactivity.”
2. A. C. Graham states that “the word *shen* tends to be used as a stative verb rather than a noun, of mysterious power and intelligence radiating from a person or thing; as English equivalent we choose ‘daimonic.’ Man can aspire . . . to that supremely lucid awareness which excites shudder of numinous awe. Thus the sage in the *Chuang Tzu* is the ‘daimonic man.’” We follow Graham’s lead because of the etymological connection in English between “daimonic” and its Greek root *daimôn*, which contains the multiple meanings of: god, intermediate spirit, one’s character, and one’s genius. In its adjectival form, it means being skilled in a thing. For the Daoist, being a sage means to be skilled at becoming the world.

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