

SPONTANEITY IN TAO TE CHING
AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR HUMAN BEING'S AUTHENTICITY

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THESIS ABSTRACT

The study is an attempt to examine the ancient response of Lao Tzu amid the western trend of finding man in the state of flux. It examines the concept of spontaneity in the Tao Te Ching, the relevance of the concept for human being's authenticity and its importance for interpersonal relationships. This study also examines the relevance of spontaneity for the Filipino society.

Chapter 2 is a discussion on the person of Lao Tzu and several important concepts found in the book. *Tao*, *Te*, *Wei wu wei* and knowledge are given importance in so far as they influence spontaneity.

Chapter 3 is an examination on the concept of spontaneity. It unfolds the two paradigms of spontaneity: spontaneity of the infant and spontaneity of the sage. The former, is an unadulterated spontaneity for the *Tao* stays in the infant and resides in him. The spontaneity of the sage is one which follows the movement of returning to the *Tao*. The sage follows the *Tao*.

Chapter 4 reveals that spontaneity, being a profound identification to the *Tao*, brings about the authenticity of the human being. Spontaneity is an authenticity to the *Tao*. It is an authenticity for it unveils the true identity of the human being. Since it is an identity to the *Tao*, spontaneity also reveals a genuine interpersonal relationship. It is characterized by true relation because it is without pretension and seeming. It lets things be. Also, spontaneity expresses its place in education. With spontaneity, a true education is an education of spontaneity for spontaneity is being drawn out. In other words, true education would reflect the essence of the human being and not the essence of the human being is reflected in his education.

The final chapter summarizes and evaluates the research undertaken. It also presents the relevance of spontaneity in the Filipino society. Due attention is given to the Filipino society's attitude toward development as well as the Filipino interpersonal spirit. In the final part, the Filipino youth is treated in relation to spontaneity. Then, the researcher lets things be, in spontaneity.

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Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SCOPE

Rationale of the Study

Does the river keep on flowing in the east? This is the question which will serve as one of the reasons of the study.

The western philosophical tradition stopped the flow by seizing it; that is, by putting up philosophical systems which keep man away from the flow, under the illusion that it is the same water flowing. Kierkegaard recognized this fact. The people of his time wanted to make life easy. They were preoccupied with the chore of developing systems, in this case the Hegelian, which would provide easy answers to questions encountered in life. Thus, discontented with the current trend, he envisioned to make life difficult.¹

Similarly, great thinkers like Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida realized the same tendency in metaphysics. Thus, what follows is the project of radical hermeneutics which is to keep man in the state of flux, to "restore life to its original difficulty".²

The making of life easy can also be found not only in philosophy but in the field of human relation. Michael D. Moga, author of What is to be Truly Human? comments that

¹William Barrett, What is Existentialism? (New York: Grove Press, 1964), p.21.

²John D. Caputo, Radical Hermeneutics (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 3-4.

man's social life is directed by rules of politeness labeled as social etiquette. This is to enable man to have a smooth and easy relation with other men without having any trouble.³ The presence of this etiquette demands an action in accordance with the unwritten provisions of this said social code. This demand becomes the main criterion for social acceptance such that one will be labeled as good if one follows the accepted norm and he will be considered as bad if he does not. Since nobody likes rejection, one just follows actions provided for by the social code. One organizes within himself the mechanism for self-control and hides behind the facade of rigid rules and structures the response coming from his very own being. Hence, one's natural act, one's natural flow is frozen and what remains is the easy and automatic action by the individual.

The existence of this phenomenon has a far-reaching effect on the human being.

Friedrich S. Perls, a famous psychotherapist, maintains that oftentimes self-control or self-repression, as demanded socially, is achieved at the expense of man's personality dysfunction: that is, man, in most cases, becomes neurotic.⁴ This implies that while man may abide with the social pressures, it does not mean that his own being

³Michael D. Moga, What is to be Truly Human? (Makati: St. Paul Publications, 1995), p. 22.

⁴Friedrich S. Perls, Ego, Hunger, and Agression (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), p. 61.

follows willingly such action. The fact is, it may even lead to the detriment of his own being.

Alan Watts, a mystic writer, upholds the same view. He accepts that in extreme cases when the so-called demand for social acceptance and repressed spontaneous act clashed, violent manifestations can be seen in crimes and neurosis or even mental disability.⁵

Man's trying to find an easy way out of the intricacies in life, that is, his trying to provide a ready-made response to every situation, puts man to the edge of falling away from his truthfulness to his own being. Man is becoming inauthentic.

Man's falling into inauthenticity necessitates a reiteration of the question and a response. Hence, the main thrust of this study is to examine the answer of Lao Tzu to the question that keeps on interfering with human existence: "What does it mean to be human?"

Theoretical Background

There are different authors who espoused the concept of spontaneity. Many of them have a background on Taoism and the rest may or may not be influenced by it. Some of these authors and their viewpoints on spontaneity will be discussed in this section.

Alan Watts, a mystic writer and the author of The Way of

⁵Alan Watts. The Way of Zen (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 10.

Zen, points out that spontaneity or *Tzu-Jan* (in a more precise term) is "nature naturing".⁶ It is nature in its nature. He believes that spontaneity resides in the individual and is clearly manifested in the child by which each child is loved and much liked. He, however, points out that it is lost because of social conventions and education (as both promote rigidity rather than spontaneity).⁷ Significantly, if a person is only spontaneous, he would be at his best. In thinking, for example, Watts contends that if a person lets his mind function spontaneously best ideas come in; and if he forces it to work, it does not function well.⁸ This goes to show that one does not need to force oneself but let one's being function spontaneously.

Ray Grigg, a Taoist scholar, looks at spontaneity as that which happens to itself in accordance to its own nature.⁹ It is one's nature acting in relationship with other natures. Thus, if one lets spontaneity prevail harmony will reign for the reason that it is inherently appropriate in the present. In addition, since spontaneity is related with other natures, a sense of balanced

⁶Ibid., p. 10.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., p. 15.

⁹Ray Grigg, The Tao of Being (Singapore: SS Mubarak brothers, 1994), p. xxxiv.