The Path:
What Chinese Philosophers Can Teach Us About The Good Life

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unconventional wisdom

Chinese philosophy around 500 BC which spawned a great era of progress in Chinese history and inspired Europe to outgrow aristocratic systems

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people are unhappy and unfulfilled

we are stuck in narrow identities

we face huge crises + feel helpless to respond

optimism is disappearing

social mobility is reduced

we have lost our way

new approaches are needed

TODAY = 600 BC

the human ecosystem is not working!
unconventional wisdom

the self is multiple, continually changing in response to external relationships and events

defining oneself isn’t the key to a liberated life – it’s too limiting

finding one’s true self and living according to the authentic self is ill-informed and constraining

you don’t know who you are or where your life is going to go

do things that don't feel like you to open up new possibilities
the self is more than our historical patterns of behavior that define who we are.

Our selves are complex, conflicting, turbulent, irrational, and changing constantly.

Self-cultivation occurs via cultivating rituals in everyday life, not downtime such as meditation and vacations.

Rituals are conscious and transformative, not rote - one becomes a different person for a moment, living "as if"
Confucius philosophy focuses on the practical and concrete, not big and abstract such as “do we have free will” or big moral or ethical frameworks.

Goodness is behaving, in response to the complexities of this moment, in a way that is good for others, drawing out their better selves.

The path is not a struggle to reach an ideal, it’s continually evolving through cultivating our choices, actions, relationships – ever new.

Life begins in the everyday messy world; only in the everyday can we begin to create a new world.
the world isn’t coherent and stable, it’s unpredictable and capricious, in perpetual disorder, needing constant work

no guarantees – e.g. hard work isn’t fair in bringing prosperity, bad deeds go unpunished

not effective to be a stable, authentic self, making plans and rational choices based on calculation and external frameworks

engage and integrate emotional and cognitive selves for full, undistracted awareness in order to make good decisions in every moment

cultivate goodness in every moment, something that we nurture, feels good, and helps us and others thrive
• maintain consciousness of the world as unstable
• respond and make decisions based on awareness of complex and ever-shifting world and self
• expect to be surprised and work with whatever befalls us
• think in terms of long term trajectories
• lay the ground so things can grow organically
Work constantly to alter things at a small, daily level.

The work of bettering oneself and others to produce a better world is never over.
Sage-like state increases influence
• everything is interconnected
• see connectivity among events, relationships, conflicts
• Soft, supple and gentle has stronger influence than powerful and dominant
• create a new world by continually making new connections
• generate a new way, new connections in every moment

Ego states reduce influence
• ego states, manifesting as separation, artifice and attachment, block awareness of interconnections
• ego states block ability to initiate new connections
• imposing one’s will isn’t long-lasting
The enduring power of the Laozi is its potential to help one become infinitely more influential through softness, not hardness; through connecting not dominating.

Generate a world that feels so natural that we can’t imagine it ever being different, even though it is newly invented.
Inward Training for Qi

Vitality

• Qi is the universal energy of life
• Qi is our consciousness, spirit
• Qi is drained by the daily grind, stresses and struggles
• cultivate emotional balance and physical health to channel Qi
• engage in activities that bring vitality and connection with Qi
• enjoy music, art, poetry, literature which are infused with Qi
Zhuangzi

- the world is in a ceaseless dance of movement and relationships, flux and shifts
- there is a constant interplay of yin and yang – darkness and light, softness and hardness – opposites provide balance
- humans battle against (not flow with) the flux, disconnecting and disrupting our own transformation
- transcend resistance to the flux, seek new perspectives
- cultivate an open state of spontaneous, trained flow or effortless engaged competence in sync with a changing world
- creativity emerges in every moment when we open ourselves to the cosmos and diverse perspectives with boundless curiosity
Do not struggle. Go with the flow of things, and you will find yourself at one with the mysterious unity of the Universe.
loyalty to and romanticization of human nature, mother nature, one’s own nature, is limiting

imperfections of human nature and nature can be improved – creating new patterns that elevate human ability to create an artificial, constructed world is a good thing

transcend endless spontaneity and struggle of nature by improving human nature and the natural world

embrace positive aspects of human manipulation and construction and improve on human mistakes
Human nature is evil, and goodness is caused by intentional activity.

— Xunzi —
the aim for stability, sincerity, authenticity are shackling human evolution

shift from human fate determined by what we are born with to a world where everyone flourishes

we are not bound to an unchangeable past or required to adhere to order, rational laws, or doctrines

begin with our messy, unwieldy emotions, cultivate improvements continually via “as if” rituals

increase vitality, make wise decisions informed by integrated hearts and minds, engage with messy experiences, improve receptivity to all experiences
• detach from identity (e.g. opinions, right & wrong) and quit search for authentic self, both are boxing in potential
• enable malleability by flowing with, not resisting, a changing world
• experiment with new rituals that upgrade relationships, outcomes and improve flourishing
• improve influence by softening hardness and improving connectivity
you go humans!