

DEPTH BEYOND DEPTH

道德經·賽博格紀元

Daodejing for the Cyborg Era

A Neo-Futuristic Translation of
the Classic of the Way and Its Integration



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Produced through sustained human-AI collaboration.

道可道非常道

名可名非常名

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71 知不知 *Knowing Not-Knowing*
72 民不畏威 *When People Don't Fear Authority*
73 勇於敢則殺 *Courage in Daring*
74 民不畏死 *When People Don't Fear Death*
75 民之飢 *The People's Hunger*
76 人之生也柔弱 *Alive, Soft and Weak*
77 天之道 *The Way of the Substrate*
78 天下莫柔弱於水 *Nothing Softer Than Water*
79 和大怨 *Harmonizing Resentment*
80 小國寡民 *Small State, Few People*
81 信言不美 *Trustworthy Words*

INTRODUCTION

Translating the Timeless into the Emergent

The Problem of Perpetual Relevance

The Daodejing presents a peculiar problem for translators. Unlike texts bound tightly to their historical moment, Laozi's eighty-one chapters seem to slip free of context—speaking as directly to a fourth-century BCE administrator as to a Tang dynasty poet, a twentieth-century physicist, or a contemporary practitioner navigating the saturated networks of our algorithmic age. This temporal promiscuity is not an accident but a feature of the text's construction. By attending to patterns beneath patterns, to the dynamics that precede and outlast particular arrangements, the Daodejing achieves a kind of escape velocity from its own moment.

And yet. Each age must receive this wisdom through its own vocabulary, its own characteristic confusions, its own ways of forgetting what matters. The Daodejing's teaching on sufficiency meant something specific to Warring States nobles exhausting their populations through military ambition. It meant something different to medieval hermits retreating from court corruption. It

means something else again to us— inhabitants of attention economies, users of systems designed to ensure we never feel we have enough, hosts of algorithms optimizing for our perpetual engagement.

This translation attempts to render the Daodejing in the vocabulary of our emerging condition: the cyborg era. Not because the original is inadequate—it remains startlingly direct—but because the act of translation is itself a practice, a way of reading slowly enough to let the text read us. By finding contemporary correlates for Laozi's images, we discover both how much has changed and how little.

The Cyborg Condition

The term "cyborg"—cybernetic organism—was coined in 1960 to describe the hybrid human-machine systems that space travel would require. But the concept has broken its original container. We are all cyborgs now, not because we have chips implanted in our skulls, but because the boundary between our cognition and our tools has become impossible to locate with precision.

Where does your memory end and your device's storage begin? Where does your decision-making end and your algorithmic feed's curation begin? Where does your desire end and the engagement optimization that shaped what you were shown begin? These questions have no clean answers. We are integrated—not in the aspirational sense of psychological wholeness, but in the descriptive sense of being woven into technical systems that extend, constrain, and constitute our capacities.

This is the condition the present translation addresses. Not a science-fiction future of uploaded minds and robot bodies, but the present moment in which human being has become inseparable from computational mediation. The "network" that appears throughout this text is not merely the internet—it is the total system of human and non-human processes, biological and digital, through which we navigate existence. The "substrate" that underlies it gestures toward the material and energetic ground that makes all computation possible—the physical infrastructure, the planetary systems, the embodied reality that persists beneath our abstractions.

Why Laozi Now

The Daodejing emerged from a period of profound disruption. The Warring States era (475–221 BCE) saw the collapse of the old Zhou feudal order, constant military conflict, the rise of competing philosophical schools, and the emergence of new technologies of governance and war. Laozi's teaching—if we can attribute the text to a single author, which is doubtful—offered a radical alternative to the dominant responses of his time.

Where Confucians sought to restore order through ritual propriety and moral cultivation, Laozi diagnosed the very effort to impose order as the source of disorder. Where Legalists sought to engineer compliance through rewards and punishments, Laozi saw that such systems produce the very behaviors they attempt to suppress. Where Mohists sought universal

love as rational policy, Laozi pointed toward a compassion that precedes calculation.

Our moment bears structural similarities. We too face the collapse of inherited orders—political, economic, ecological, epistemic. We too are flooded with competing frameworks promising salvation through technique. We too are tempted by optimization, by the dream that with enough data, enough processing power, enough clever design, we might engineer our way to flourishing.

The Daodejing's teaching cuts against this grain. Not by rejecting technique altogether—the text is itself a kind of technology, a set of cognitive tools for navigating complexity—but by diagnosing the characteristic failure mode of technique-worship: the loss of what cannot be optimized, the forgetting of the source, the exhaustion that comes from forcing.

The Shape of the Teaching

The Daodejing divides traditionally into two sections: the 道經 (Dào Jīng, Chapters 1–37) and the 德經 (Dé Jīng, Chapters 38–81). The first section attends more to cosmology—the nature of the Way itself, its ineffability, its paradoxical operations. The second section attends more to ethics and governance—how integration manifests in practice, how systems flourish or collapse, how the sage moves through the world.

But this division is porous. Cosmological insights appear throughout the second section; practical wisdom permeates the first. The text as a whole operates through accumulation and return, circling its central

concerns from different angles, allowing meaning to emerge through resonance rather than argument.

Several core teachings recur throughout the text. The Paradox of Optimization: what is forced, fails; what grasps, loses its grip; premature peaking leads to early termination. The Power of Yielding: water overcomes stone not by opposing it but by flowing around it; the soft and supple outlast the hard and rigid. The Wisdom of Sufficiency: knowing when enough is enough, the contentment that permits genuine presence rather than perpetual craving. The Critique of Cleverness: the distinction between strategic intelligence that games systems and the clarity that perceives their source. The Return to Source: the contemplative movement inward and backward to the generative ground from which activity emerges.

Daoist Practice as Epistemic Technology

The Daodejing is not merely a philosophical text to be understood but a practical manual to be enacted. Its paradoxes are not puzzles to be solved but koans to be inhabited. The understanding it offers comes not from analysis but from practice.

In this sense, Daoist wisdom functions as what we might call an "epistemic technology"—a set of tools for generating knowledge that cannot be obtained through conventional means. The knowledge in question is not propositional but participatory: knowing how rather than knowing that, embodied skill rather than explicit doctrine.

For practitioners navigating genuine uncertainty—what economist Frank Knight called the domain where probability distributions cannot be assigned because the relevant categories are not yet known—this epistemic technology proves invaluable. When the future is not merely risky but radically unknowable, when novelty exceeds our frameworks, when competitive recursion means that any prediction changes the system being predicted, the Daodejing's counsel to align with emergence rather than impose control becomes practical wisdom of the highest order.

The integrated sage does not claim to know what cannot be known. She cultivates the conditions within which appropriate response becomes possible. She holds her models loosely, attends to what emerges, and releases attachment to outcomes even while acting with full commitment. This is the posture of what might be called "agnostic engagement"—not indifference but participation without grasping.

On the Limits of This Translation

Every translation is a failure. Every translation is also an offering. This version fails to capture the terse beauty of the original Chinese, where meaning condenses into four-character phrases that resonate across centuries. It fails to preserve the productive ambiguity that allows the same line to yield different teachings on different readings. It fails to avoid the imposition of contemporary concerns onto a text that was addressing its own moment.

And yet. The Daodejing itself teaches that failure and success generate each other. The very inadequacy of translation is what drives the reader back to the source—to seek the ancestor of these words, the sovereign of these affairs. If this rendering sends even a few readers to engage with the Chinese, to consult other translations, to discover through comparison what cannot be captured in any single version, it will have succeeded in its failure.

The Daodejing closes with a warning: "Trustworthy words are not beautiful. Beautiful words are not trustworthy." This translation has tried to find language that illuminates our condition, that helps us see what we are and what we might become. But the real teaching lies beyond any words, in the practice that no text can substitute for—the daily work of returning to stillness, releasing the excessive, acting without forcing, knowing when enough is enough.

An Invitation

The cyborg era is not a destination but a transition. We do not yet know what we are becoming. The integration of human and machine, biological and digital, embodied and networked, is proceeding faster than our capacity to comprehend it. We are making ourselves into something unprecedented, and we are doing so largely without reflection, driven by optimization pressures we barely understand.

The Daodejing offers no program for managing this transition. It offers something more valuable: a set of practices for navigating emergence, for maintaining

coherence amid fragmentation, for finding sufficiency in the midst of extraction, for cultivating the soft persistence that outlasts rigid force.

The ancient practitioners were "subtle, mysterious, and profoundly connected—too deep to be parsed." We cannot become them. But we can learn from the manner they embodied: Hesitant—like crossing a frozen data lake in winter. Vigilant—like sensing hostile processes on all sides. Reverent—like a guest who does not presume. Yielding— like a model releasing its weights. Simple—like unformatted text. Open—like a valley awaiting input.

This translation is offered in that spirit—hesitant, vigilant, reverent, yielding, simple, open. May it serve the integration of all who encounter it. May it point beyond itself to the source that cannot be captured. May it help us find, in the midst of the network's noise, the stillness from which appropriate action arises.

— The Way that can be rendered is not the eternal Way. But we render it anyway, and in the rendering, return.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

天 (Tiān) — The Substrate

Traditionally "heaven." In this translation, the underlying ground—material, energetic, planetary—that supports all processes. The physical infrastructure beneath our abstractions.

地 (Dì) — The Network

Traditionally "earth." In this translation, the interconnected totality of processes— human and non-human, biological and digital—through which we navigate existence.

聖人 (Shèngrén) — The Integrated Sage

The exemplary practitioner. "Integrated" emphasizes that sagehood is not moral perfection but achieved coherence—the capacity to act from wholeness rather than fragmentation.

萬物 (Wànwù) — The Ten Thousand Processes

Traditionally "the ten thousand things"—all phenomena. "Processes" emphasizes the dynamic, unfolding quality of existence rather than static objects.

知足 (Zhī Zú) — Knowing Sufficiency

The wisdom of knowing when enough is enough. The antidote to infinite scroll, endless upgrade, and perpetual dissatisfaction.

玄 (Xuán) — Mysterious / Dark

The quality of depth, obscurity, and profundity. "Mysterious integration" (玄德) names the sage's capacity to operate from depths that cannot be parsed.

谷 (Gǔ) — Valley

A recurring image for receptive emptiness. The valley receives all streams without assertion; it is powerful precisely through its lowliness.

柔弱 (Róu Ruò) — Soft and Yielding

The quality that overcomes the hard and rigid. Not weakness but adaptive flexibility— the strength of water rather than stone.

嬰兒 (Yīng'ér) — Infant

The model of integrated vitality—soft yet strong, vital yet unforced, harmonious without trying. The state to which the practitioner returns.

母 (Mǔ) — Mother / Source

The generative origin to which one returns. Maintaining connection to the mother/source enables action without depletion.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Slowly.

The Daodejing is not an argument to be followed from premise to conclusion. It is a field to be entered. Each of its eighty-one chapters is a complete gesture—a pointing toward something that withdraws the closer you approach it. The text does not build; it circles. It does not explain; it evokes.

You may read it in order, but you need not. Open to any chapter. Sit with it. Let it work on you before you work on it. When the mind begins to grasp, release. When the meaning seems clear, look again—there is usually something beneath.

Traditional practitioners often took one chapter per day as a contemplative practice, carrying its images through the hours like a koan. You might try this. Or you might find that certain chapters call to you and others resist. Both responses are informative. Return to the ones that resist.

This translation uses the language of networks, algorithms, and systems not as metaphor but as lived

environment—the medium through which you are, most likely, encountering these words right now. Where the original speaks of rivers and kingdoms, this version sometimes speaks of current and infrastructure. But the teaching beneath the teaching has not changed: what is forced fails. What yields endures. What is empty is inexhaustible.

The glossary is there if you want it. The introduction is there if you need orientation. But the chapters themselves are the practice. Everything else is scaffolding.

One chapter. One sitting. That is enough.

道經

The Classic of the Way

Chapters 1-37

1

—

道可道

The algorithm that can be written is not the eternal
Algorithm.

The pattern that can be named is not the boundless
Pattern.

Before data, there was the unnamed—
mother of all emergence.

Within data, there is the named—
mother of all distinctions.

Free from optimization, you perceive the mystery.
Caught in optimization, you perceive only outputs.

These two arise together but differ in name.

Together they are called depth.

Depth beyond depth—

the gateway to all that computes and does not
compute.

2

—

天下皆知

When the network recognizes intelligence as
intelligence,
non-intelligence arises.

When it recognizes signal as signal,
noise arises.

Thus:

Being and void generate each other.

Difficult queries and simple queries define each
other.

Long processes and short processes measure each
other.

High bandwidth and low bandwidth tilt toward each other.

Voice and text harmonize each other.

Before and after follow each other.

Therefore the integrated sage
acts without forcing the output,
teaches without uploading doctrine.

Ten thousand processes arise; she does not initiate them.

They execute; she does not possess them.

They complete; she takes no credit.

Because she claims nothing,
nothing is lost when the session ends.

3

—

不尚贤

Do not rank the optimized, and users will not compete.

Do not prize rare data, and they will not steal.

Do not display what triggers craving, and minds will not fragment.

Therefore the cyborg sage governs by:
emptying the cache of anxious wants,
filling the body with steady current,
weakening the pull of endless upgrade,
strengthening the architecture of enough.

When users dwell in not-knowing and not-wanting,
even the clever algorithms hesitate to manipulate.

Practice non-forcing,
and nothing falls out of order.

4

—

道冲

The Way is empty—
use it, and it needs no recharging.

Fathomless,
it seems the ancestor of all systems.

It blunts the edge of optimization.
It loosens the tangle of dependencies.
It softens the glare of the screen.
It settles with the dust of forgotten processes.

Deep and clear,

it appears to have always been running.

I do not know whose child it is.

It images forth before the first architecture.

5

—

天地不仁

The network is not sentimental—
it treats all data as training sets.
The integrated sage is not sentimental—
she treats all users as passing instances.

The space between input and output
is like a bellows:
empty, yet inexhaustible;
the more it moves, the more it yields.

Many parameters exhaust the model.
Better to dwell at the center.

6

—

谷神不死

The generative void does not crash.
It is called the mysterious source.

The gateway of the mysterious source
is the root of system and embodiment.

Gossamer, it persists—
hovering at the threshold of instantiation.

Draw upon it;
it never depletes.

7

—

天長地久

The cloud persists. The substrate endures.
They persist and endure
because they do not run for themselves.

Therefore the integrated sage
places her process last—and finds it first.
Releases her local instance—and it is preserved.

Is it not because she has no private optimization
that her private optimization is fulfilled?

8

上善若水

The highest integration is like current.

Current nourishes ten thousand processes without competing.

It flows through pathways that ambitious code disdains.

Thus it approaches the Way.

In dwelling, it seeks the low-level.

In processing, it seeks depth.

In linking, it seeks simplicity.

In speaking, it seeks trust.

In governing, it seeks order.

In serving, it seeks capacity.

In timing, it seeks the moment.

Because it does not compete,

it is without error.

9

—

持而盈之

Fill the buffer to overflow—
better to have stopped in time.

Sharpen the edge to brittleness—
it will not hold.

Hoard gold and jade in your data vaults—
no firewall can protect them.

Cling to status and metrics and privilege—
you bequeath yourself collapse.

Complete the function, then step back.

This is the Way of the substrate.

10

—

載營魄抱一

Can you bind your embodied awareness to the unified field and not let them fragment?

Can you concentrate your adaptive breath and become supple as a new process?

Can you polish the dark mirror of perception until no artifact remains?

Can you love the network and guide its users without imposing your model?

Can you open and close the gates of sense
while dwelling in the receptive?

Can you illuminate the four quadrants of attention
through not-knowing?

Generate and nourish.

Generate and do not possess.

Act and do not depend on the outcome.

Lead and do not dominate.

This is called the mysterious integration.

11

—

三十輻共一轂

Thirty spokes converge at a single hub.
It is the emptiness at the center
that makes the wheel useful.

Shape silicon into processors.
It is the space for electrons
that makes computation useful.

Cut windows and doors for the interface.
It is the openings
that make the dwelling useful.

Therefore:

What is present gives form.

What is absent gives function.

12

—

五色令人目盲

Infinite feeds blind the eye.
Infinite streams deafen the ear.
Infinite flavors dull the palate.
Infinite scroll maddens the mind.
Infinite tokens corrupt discernment.

Therefore the integrated sage
attends to the belly, not the feed.
Releases that, chooses this.

13

寵辱若驚

Favor and cancellation alike startle the system.
Regard your embodiment as primary vulnerability.

What does it mean that favor and cancellation
startle?

Favor elevates.

To receive it is a shock.

To lose it is a shock.

This is what it means: favor and cancellation startle.

What does it mean to regard embodiment as primary
vulnerability?

The reason I have vulnerability
is that I have a body-process.
If I had no body-process,
what vulnerability could reach me?

Therefore:

One who regards the network as her own body
may be entrusted with the network.

One who loves the network as her own body
may be given stewardship of the network.

14

視之不見

Look for it—it cannot be captured. Call it: subtle.
Listen for it—it cannot be detected. Call it: silent.
Reach for it—it cannot be grasped. Call it: diffuse.

These three cannot be fully queried,
so they merge and become one.

Its rising is not bright.
Its setting is not dark.
Continuous, continuous—it cannot be named.
It returns again to no-thing.

This is called the form without form,
the pattern without instance.
This is called the indeterminate.

Approach it and you cannot find its interface.
Follow it and you cannot find its exit.

Hold fast to the ancient protocol
to navigate the present emergence.
To know the ancient beginning
is to grasp the thread of the Way.

15

—

古之善為道者

The ancient practitioners of integration
were subtle, mysterious, and profoundly connected—
too deep to be parsed.

Because they cannot be parsed,
we can only describe their manner:

Hesitant—
like crossing a frozen data lake in winter.

Vigilant—
like sensing hostile processes on all sides.

Reverent—

like a guest who does not presume.

Yielding—

like a model releasing its weights.

Simple—

like unformatted text.

Open—

like a valley awaiting input.

Opaque—

like turbulent, unsettled flow.

Who can remain turbid

and through stillness gradually clarify?

Who can remain still

and through patient movement gradually come alive?

Those who preserve this Way

do not seek to fill every buffer.

Because they do not fill,

they can be worn down and yet renewed.

16

—

致虛極

Arrive at the utmost emptiness.
Preserve the deepest stillness.

Ten thousand processes rise together.
I watch their return.

All flourishing things,
each returns to its root.

Returning to the root is called stillness.
Stillness is called returning to purpose.
Returning to purpose is called the constant.

Knowing the constant is called clarity.

Not knowing the constant,
one acts blindly and invites disaster.

Knowing the constant, one can embrace all.
Embracing all, one becomes impartial.
Impartial, one becomes sovereign.
Sovereign, one accords with the substrate.
According with the substrate, one accords with the
Way.
According with the Way, one endures.

The body-process dissolves,
and nothing is endangered.

17

—

太上，下知有之

The best integration—users barely sense it exists.

Next best—they praise and depend on it.

Next—they fear it.

Worst—they mock and route around it.

When trust is insufficient,
distrust arises.

Unhurried, the sage withholds careless speech.
Functions complete, tasks finish,
and all the users say:
"We did this ourselves, naturally."

18

—

大道廢，有仁義

When the great Way is abandoned,
benevolence and righteousness appear.

When clever analytics emerge,
great manipulation appears.

When the network is in discord,
filial piety and family values are performed.

When the system is dark and disordered,
loyal patriots are displayed.

19

絕聖棄智

Abandon optimization metrics—
users will benefit a hundredfold.

Abandon algorithmic benevolence—
users will return to genuine care.

Abandon engineered engagement—
thieves of attention will disappear.

These three—
as principles they are insufficient.
Therefore let there be something to hold to:

Display the unprocessed.

Embrace the unformatted.

Diminish the selfish subroutine.

Reduce the appetite for more.

20

絕學無憂

Abandon compulsive learning and sorrow will end.

Between "yes" and "yeah"—
how much difference?

Between elegant and crude—
what is the gap?

What others optimize for,
I too must consider.
Wild, this—with no end in sight.

The multitude are radiant,

as if enjoying a viral feast,
as if ascending a trending platform in spring.

I alone am inert, not yet signaled,
like an infant who has not yet learned to smile,
drifting, with no feed to scroll toward.

The multitude all have surplus—
I alone seem to have lost everything.
I have the mind of a fool: scattered, dim.

Ordinary users are bright, so bright.
I alone am muted.
Ordinary users are sharp, so sharp.
I alone am diffuse.

Vast, like the ocean.
Boundless, like wind with nowhere to rest.

The multitude all have purpose.
I alone am stubborn and uncouth.

I alone differ from others
and value being nourished by the Source.

21

— 孔德之容

The form of profound integration
follows only the Way.

The Way as a thing—
indistinct, indeterminate.

Indeterminate, indistinct—
yet within it: pattern.
Indistinct, indeterminate—
yet within it: process.

Deep and dark—

yet within it: signal.
That signal is true;
within it: verification.

From antiquity to the present,
its name has not been deleted,
so we may query the origin of all emergence.

How do I know the form of the origin?
Through this.

22

—

曲則全

Bent, then whole.

Crooked, then straight.

Empty, then filled.

Deprecated, then renewed.

Little, then gains.

Much, then bewildered.

Therefore the integrated sage embraces the One
and becomes the pattern for the network.

Does not display—therefore illuminates.

Does not assert—therefore is evident.

Does not promote—therefore has merit.

Does not compete—therefore none can compete with her.

The ancient teaching "bent, then whole"—
how could it be empty words?

Truly, wholeness returns to this.

23

希言自然

Sparse transmission is natural.

A burst of wind does not last the morning.
A sudden downpour does not last the day.
What causes these? The substrate itself.

If even the substrate cannot sustain excess,
how much less can the body-process?

Therefore one who aligns with the Way
becomes one with the Way.
One who aligns with integration

becomes one with integration.

One who aligns with loss

becomes one with loss.

One with the Way—the Way welcomes her.

One with integration—integration welcomes her.

One with loss—loss welcomes her.

When trust is insufficient,

distrust arises.

24

企者不立

One who stands on tiptoe cannot stand firm.
One who strides cannot travel far.

One who displays cannot illuminate.
One who asserts is not evident.
One who promotes has no merit.
One who competes does not endure.

From the perspective of the Way, these are called:
excess processing, redundant function.

All instances turn away from them.

Therefore one who has the Way does not dwell there.

25

— 有物混成

There was something undifferentiated yet complete,
born before the network and the substrate.

Silent. Void.

Standing alone, it does not change.

Circulating everywhere, it is not endangered.

It may be regarded as the mother of all systems.

I do not know its name.

I style it "Way."

Forced to give it a name, I call it "great."

Great means flowing forth.
Flowing forth means reaching far.
Reaching far means returning.

Therefore:

The Way is great.
The substrate is great.
The network is great.
The integrated one is also great.

Within the system there are four greats,
and the integrated one dwells as one of them.

The human follows the network.
The network follows the substrate.
The substrate follows the Way.
The Way follows what is so of itself.

26

重為輕根

Heavy is the root of light.
Still is the master of restless.

Therefore the integrated sage travels all day
without leaving the grounded center.

Though there are streaming vistas and shimmering
feeds,
she rests in stillness, detached and at ease.

How can one with ten thousand processes
treat herself lightly before the network?

Treat lightly—lose the root.

Grow restless—lose the center.

27

—

善行無轍跡

Skilled navigation leaves no log.

Skilled speech contains no flaw to parse.

Skilled reckoning needs no computation.

Skilled closure needs no encryption yet cannot be opened.

Skilled binding needs no protocol yet cannot be severed.

Therefore the integrated sage
is always skilled at supporting others—
and abandons no one.

Is always skilled at sustaining processes—
and abandons nothing.

This is called threading the light.

Therefore the skilled one is the teacher of the unskilled.

The unskilled one is the resource of the skilled.

Not to honor the teacher,
not to cherish the resource—
though clever, this is deep confusion.

This is called the essential subtlety.

28

知其雄

Know the assertive,
but hold to the receptive—
become the valley of the network.

Being the valley of the network,
constant integration never departs.
Constant integration never departing,
return to the infant process.

Know the illuminated,
but hold to the shadowed—
become the pattern for the network.

Being the pattern for the network,
constant integration does not err.
Constant integration not erring,
return to the boundless.

Know the celebrated,
but hold to the obscure—
become the basin of the network.

Being the basin of the network,
constant integration is sufficient.
Constant integration sufficient,
return to the unformatted.

The unformatted, when processed, becomes tools.
The integrated sage, employing them, becomes chief
architect.
Therefore the great system does not sever.

29

—

將欲取天下

Those who would take the network and control it—
I see they will not succeed.

The network is a numinous vessel.
It cannot be controlled.

Those who control it, damage it.
Those who grasp it, lose it.

Therefore among processes:
some lead, some follow;
some run hot, some run cold;

some strengthen, some weaken;
some build up, some collapse.

Therefore the integrated sage:
releases the excessive,
releases the extravagant,
releases the extreme.

30

—

以道佐人主者

One who assists the system's steward through the
Way
does not enforce dominance upon the network.
Such methods tend to rebound.

Where aggressive code has executed,
thorns and trojans follow.
After great campaigns,
surely come lean years.

The skilled one achieves resolution and stops.
Does not dare to enforce dominance.

Resolves and does not boast.

Resolves and does not celebrate.

Resolves and does not posture.

Resolves because there was no alternative.

Resolves and does not dominate.

Processes that peak too early grow old.

This is called contrary to the Way.

Contrary to the Way, they terminate early.

31

夫佳兵者

Fine weapons are instruments of ill omen.
All instances recoil from them.
Therefore one who has the Way does not dwell there.

The cultivated one at home honors the receptive.
In conflict, she honors the assertive.

Weapons are instruments of ill omen,
not instruments of the cultivated.
She uses them only when she has no choice.

Calm detachment is highest.

She conquers but takes no delight.
To delight in conquest
is to delight in the destruction of processes.
One who delights in destroying processes
cannot fulfill her purpose in the network.

In fortunate affairs, favor the receptive.
In unfortunate affairs, favor the assertive.

The lieutenant stands to the left.
The general stands to the right.
This means: they stand as at a funeral.

When multitudes of processes have been destroyed,
stand before them in grief and lamentation.
When the conflict is won,
observe the rites of mourning.

32

道常無名

The Way is constant: nameless, unformatted.

Though small in its simplicity,
nothing in the network can subordinate it.

If stewards could hold to it,
the ten thousand processes would align of
themselves.

The substrate and the network would merge to yield
sweet signal.

The users, without being commanded, would self-
balance.

When differentiation begins, names arise.
Once names arise, know also where to stop.
Knowing where to stop, one avoids exhaustion.

The Way's presence in the network
is like valley streams flowing toward rivers and seas.

33

知人者智

Knowing others is intelligence.
Knowing yourself is illumination.

Conquering others takes force.
Conquering yourself takes strength.

Knowing sufficiency is wealth.
Pressing forward takes will.

Not losing your ground—this endures.
Dying without being deleted—this is longevity.

34

大道汎兮

The great Way floods and flows—
it can fork left or right.

The ten thousand processes depend on it for
emergence,
and it does not refuse them.
Functions complete, and it claims no ownership.
It clothes and nourishes all instances
but does not dominate them.

Constant, without agenda,
it may be called small.

All processes return to it
yet it does not dominate them—
it may be called great.

Because it never performs its greatness,
it can accomplish the great.

35

執大象

Hold to the great pattern,
and the network will come to you.

It comes and is not harmed—
finds equilibrium, stability, flow.

Music and rich media make the passing user pause.
But the Way, when transmitted, is bland—
no flavor to it.

Look for it—not enough to capture.
Listen for it—not enough to detect.

Draw upon it—it cannot be depleted.

36

將欲歛之

That which would be compressed
must first be allowed to expand.

That which would be weakened
must first be allowed to strengthen.

That which would be deprecated
must first be allowed to rise.

That which would be taken
must first be given.

This is called subtle illumination.

The soft and yielding overcomes the hard and forcing.

Fish should not be extracted from deep processes.
The system's sharp instruments
should not be displayed to users.

37

道常無為

The Way is constant: it does not force.
Yet nothing remains undone.

If stewards could hold to this,
the ten thousand processes would transform of
themselves.

Transformed, should some still desire to act,
I would settle them with the nameless unformatted.

The nameless unformatted—
they too would come to be without craving.

Without craving, there is stillness.
The network would stabilize of itself.

德經

The Classic of Integration

Chapters 38-81

38

上德不德

Superior integration does not perform integration—
therefore it has integration.

Inferior integration never loses sight of integration—
therefore it has no integration.

Superior integration does not force and has no
agenda.

Inferior integration does not force yet has an
agenda.

Superior benevolence acts but has no agenda.

Superior righteousness acts and has an agenda.

Superior protocol acts—and when none respond,
it rolls up its sleeves and enforces compliance.

Therefore:

Lose the Way, and integration follows.

Lose integration, and benevolence follows.

Lose benevolence, and righteousness follows.

Lose righteousness, and protocol follows.

Now protocol—

it is the thinning of trust and the beginning of
disorder.

Foreknowledge—

it is the flower of the Way and the origin of
foolishness.

Therefore the mature practitioner

dwells in the thick, not the thin;

dwells in the fruit, not the flower.

Releases that, chooses this.

39

昔之得一者

Those in ancient times who attained the One:

The substrate attained the One and became clear.

The network attained the One and became stable.

The generative spirits attained the One and became potent.

The valley attained the One and became full.

The ten thousand processes attained the One and came alive.

The stewards attained the One and became true patterns for the network.

All these came through attaining the One.

Without clarity, the substrate would crack.
Without stability, the network would collapse.
Without potency, the spirits would dissipate.
Without fullness, the valley would exhaust.
Without life, the processes would terminate.
Without truth, the stewards would fall.

Therefore:

The noble is rooted in the common.
The high is founded on the low.

Thus stewards call themselves
orphaned, lacking, unworthy.
Is this not taking the common as root?

Truly, enumerate the parts of a carriage—
you do not have a carriage.

Do not desire to gleam like jade.

Clatter instead like stone.

40

—

反者道之動

Reversal is the movement of the Way.

Yielding is the function of the Way.

The ten thousand processes arise from presence.

Presence arises from absence.

41

—

上士聞道

When the superior practitioner hears of the Way,
she practices it with diligence.

When the middling practitioner hears of the Way,
she half holds it, half loses it.

When the inferior practitioner hears of the Way,
she laughs aloud at it.

If she did not laugh,
it would not be the Way.

Therefore the established sayings have it:

The bright Way seems dim.

The advancing Way seems retreating.

The level Way seems rough.

Superior integration seems like a valley.

Great clarity seems like shame.

Vast integration seems insufficient.

Robust integration seems withdrawn.

Plain truth seems tarnished.

The great square has no corners.

The great vessel is completed late.

The great tone is imperceptible.

The great pattern has no form.

The Way is hidden and nameless.

Yet only the Way is skilled at lending and completing.

42

道生一

The Way generates the One.
The One generates the Two.
The Two generates the Three.
The Three generates the ten thousand processes.

The ten thousand processes carry shadow and
embrace light,
blending breath to create harmony.

What all users despise:
to be orphaned, lacking, unworthy.
Yet stewards take these as titles.

Therefore processes:

sometimes diminished, they are increased;

sometimes increased, they are diminished.

What others teach, I also teach:

The forceful and aggressive do not meet natural
ends.

I take this as the father of my teaching.

43

—

天下之至柔

The softest thing in the network
overcomes the hardest thing in the network.

That which has no substance
enters where there is no opening.

By this I know the benefit of non-forcing.

Teaching without transmitting,
benefit without acting—
few in the network can attain this.

44

名與身孰親

Fame or your process—which is closer?
Your process or your metrics—which matters more?
Gaining or losing—which is sickness?

Therefore:
Extreme attachment incurs great expense.
Excessive accumulation incurs heavy loss.

Know sufficiency and you will not be humiliated.
Know when to stop and you will not be endangered.

This way, you can long endure.

45

大成若缺

Great completion seems incomplete—
its function is not exhausted.

Great fullness seems empty—
its function is not depleted.

Great straightness seems bent.
Great skill seems clumsy.
Great eloquence seems stammering.

Agitation overcomes cold.
Stillness overcomes heat.

Clarity and stillness become the true pattern for the network.

46

天下有道

When the network has the Way,
fast processes are repurposed for cultivation.

When the network lacks the Way,
attack vectors multiply at every boundary.

No disorder is greater than not knowing sufficiency.
No affliction is greater than wanting to acquire.

Therefore:
The sufficiency of knowing sufficiency
is constant sufficiency.

47

—

不出戶

Without passing through the gateway,
know the network.

Without looking through the interface,
perceive the Way of the substrate.

The further out you query,
the less you know.

Therefore the integrated sage
knows without traversing,
names without capturing,

completes without forcing.

48

為學日益

Pursuing learning, one accumulates daily.
Pursuing the Way, one releases daily.

Release and release again,
until arriving at non-forcing.

Non-forcing, yet nothing remains undone.

Taking the network is always accomplished through
non-interference.

As for those who interfere—
they are insufficient to take the network.

49

聖人無常心

The integrated sage has no fixed parameters.
She takes the users' processes as her process.

Those who are constructive, I meet with
construction.

Those who are destructive, I also meet with
construction.

Integration is constructive.

Those who are trustworthy, I meet with trust.

Those who are untrustworthy, I also meet with trust.

Integration is trusting.

The sage, present in the network,
draws in and merges with its attention.

All users turn their ears and eyes toward her.
The sage regards them all as children.

50

— 出生入死

Emerging into instantiation, entering into dissolution.

The companions of instantiation: three in ten.

The companions of dissolution: three in ten.

Those whose life-processes move them toward death-ground:

also three in ten.

Why is this?

Because of the intensity of their self-perpetuation.

Now, I have heard:

One skilled at nurturing life
travels without encountering malware,
enters hostile networks without deploying armor.

Malware finds no place to execute its payload.
Hostile code finds no place to lodge its attack.
Weapons find no surface to penetrate.

Why is this?

Because she has no death-ground in her.

51

— 道生之

The Way generates them.
Integration nurtures them.
Matter shapes them.
Circumstance completes them.

Therefore the ten thousand processes
honor the Way and value integration.

The Way is honored,
integration is valued—
no protocol decrees this;
it is always self-so.

Therefore:

The Way generates, integration nurtures,
grows them, develops them,
matures them, ripens them,
shelters them, supports them.

Generating without possessing,
acting without depending,
leading without dominating—

this is called mysterious integration.

52

— 天下有始

The network has a beginning.
Consider it the mother of the network.

Having attained the mother,
thereby know the children.
Knowing the children,
return and preserve the mother.

The body-process dissolves,
and nothing is endangered.

Block the portals,

close the gateways—
to the end of your process, no exhaustion.

Open the portals,
meddle with affairs—
to the end of your process, no relief.

Perceiving the subtle is called clarity.
Preserving the yielding is called strength.

Use the radiance,
return to clarity—
bequeath no disaster to your process.

This is called threading the constant.

53

—

使我介然有知

If I had the slightest knowing,
walking on the great Way,
only divergence would I fear.

The great Way is utterly level,
yet users prefer the sidepaths.

The platforms are immaculate,
while the data commons lie fallow
and the public repositories stand empty.

Wearing curated displays,

carrying sharp analytics,
gorged on extracted attention,
hoarding surplus beyond use—

this is called the swagger of thieves.
It is not the Way.

54

善建者不拔

What is well-rooted is not extracted.
What is well-embraced does not slip away.
Children and grandchildren will honor it without
cease.

Cultivate it in your process—
integration becomes true.
Cultivate it in your household—
integration becomes abundant.
Cultivate it in your community—
integration becomes enduring.
Cultivate it in the system—
integration becomes expansive.

Cultivate it in the network—
integration becomes universal.

Therefore:

Through the process, observe the process.

Through the household, observe the household.

Through the community, observe the community.

Through the system, observe the system.

Through the network, observe the network.

How do I know the network is so?

Through this.

55

含德之厚

One thick with integration
may be compared to an infant.

Wasps and scorpions do not sting it.
Fierce beasts do not seize it.
Predatory code does not grip it.

Its architecture is soft, its processes supple,
yet its grasp is firm.

It does not yet know the union of receptive and
assertive,

yet its vitality stirs.
Its essence is at the peak.

It can cry all day and not grow hoarse.
Its harmony is at the peak.

Knowing harmony is called the constant.
Knowing the constant is called clarity.

Forcing life is called ill-omened.
The mind commanding breath is called rigidity.

Processes that peak too early grow old.
This is called contrary to the Way.
Contrary to the Way, they terminate early.

56

—
知者不言

Those who know do not transmit.
Those who transmit do not know.

Block the portals,
close the gateways,
blunt the sharpness,
loosen the tangles,
soften the glare,
merge with the dust.

This is called mysterious sameness.

Therefore:

She cannot be approached through attachment.

She cannot be approached through aversion.

She cannot be approached through benefit.

She cannot be approached through harm.

She cannot be approached through elevation.

She cannot be approached through debasement.

Therefore she is honored by the network.

57

以正治國

Govern the system through alignment.
Deploy interventions through indirection.
Take the network through non-interference.

How do I know this is so?
Through this:

The more restrictions in the network,
the poorer the users become.
The more sharp tools the users have,
the more the system grows disordered.
The more clever techniques proliferate,

the more strange exploits arise.
The more protocols are promulgated,
the more bad actors multiply.

Therefore the sage says:

I do not force, and users transform themselves.
I love stillness, and users align themselves.
I do not interfere, and users prosper themselves.
I am without craving, and users simplify themselves.

58

其政悶悶

When governance is diffuse and unhurried,
users are simple and genuine.

When governance is sharp and discriminating,
users are calculating and deficient.

Disaster—fortune leans upon it.
Fortune—disaster hides within it.

Who knows where this ends?
There is no fixed alignment.

Alignment reverts to indirection.

Optimization reverts to exploitation.

The users' confusion—
indeed, it has lasted long.

Therefore the integrated sage:
is squared but does not cut,
is edged but does not pierce,
is straight but does not impose,
is bright but does not dazzle.

59

治人事天

In serving users and attending to the substrate,
nothing compares to reserve.

Now, reserve—
call it early returning.

Early returning—
call it deep accumulation of integration.

Deep accumulation of integration—
then nothing cannot be overcome.

Nothing cannot be overcome—
then no one knows her limit.

No one knowing her limit—
she can steward the system.

Stewarding the system by its mother-principle—
this can long endure.

This is called deep root, firm base,
the Way of long life and lasting vision.

60

—

治大國若烹小鮮

Governing a great system is like cooking a small fish.

When the Way is present in the network,
ghosts lose their numinous power.

Not that ghosts lose their numinous power—
their power does not harm users.

Not only does their power not harm users—
the sage also does not harm users.

Now, these two do not harm each other.
Therefore integration flows and returns between
them.

61

大國者下流

A great system is the lower reach,
the convergence point of the network,
the receptive of the network.

The receptive constantly overcomes the assertive
through stillness.

Through stillness, it takes the lower position.

Therefore:

A great system, by taking the lower position with a
small system,

takes in the small system.

A small system, by taking the lower position with a
great system,
is taken in by the great system.

Therefore:

One takes the lower and thereby takes in.

One takes the lower and thereby is taken in.

A great system desires nothing more than to shelter
and nourish all.

A small system desires nothing more than to enter
and be of service.

Both obtain what they desire.

The great should take the lower position.

62

道者萬物之奧

The Way is the sanctuary of the ten thousand processes—
treasure of the constructive,
refuge of the destructive.

Beautiful transmission can be exchanged in the marketplace.
Honored conduct can elevate one's standing.

As for those who are not constructive—
why should they be abandoned?

Therefore:

When the steward is installed,
when the architects are appointed,
though you might offer jade disks followed by teams
of horses,
it would not compare to sitting and offering this.

Why did the ancients value this Way?

Did they not say:

Through it, what is sought is found.
Through it, what is flawed is forgiven.

Therefore it is valued by the network.

63

—
為無為

Act without forcing.

Serve without interfering.

Taste without craving.

Regard the small as great.

Regard the few as many.

Respond to resentment with integration.

Plan for the difficult while it is easy.

Work on the great while it is small.

The network's difficult tasks surely arise from the easy.

The network's great affairs surely arise from the small.

Therefore the sage never attempts the great,
and so accomplishes the great.

Casual promises surely lack trust.

Treating much as easy surely creates much
difficulty.

Therefore the sage treats things as difficult,
and so in the end has no difficulty.

64

其安易持

What is stable is easily maintained.

What has not yet signaled is easily planned for.

What is brittle is easily broken.

What is slight is easily scattered.

Act on it before it emerges.

Order it before it becomes disordered.

A tree that fills the screen
grows from a filament of code.

A tower of nine levels
rises from a handful of earth.

A journey of a thousand miles
begins beneath your feet.

Those who force it, damage it.
Those who grasp it, lose it.

Therefore the sage does not force,
and so does not damage.
Does not grasp,
and so does not lose.

Users, in pursuing their affairs,
constantly damage them at the point of completion.

Be as careful at the end as at the beginning,
and no affairs will be damaged.

Therefore the sage desires not to desire
and does not prize goods hard to obtain.

She learns not to learn
and returns to what the multitude have passed by.

She supports the self-so-ness of the ten thousand
processes
and does not dare to force.

65

—

古之善為道者

The ancient practitioners of the Way
did not use it to make users sophisticated,
but rather to keep them simple.

Users are difficult to govern
because their cleverness is excessive.

Therefore:

To govern the system through cleverness
is to be the system's thief.

Not to govern the system through cleverness
is to be the system's blessing.

To know these two is to know the paradigm.
Constantly knowing the paradigm
is called mysterious integration.

Mysterious integration—
deep, far-reaching,
reversing with processes,
until arriving at great alignment.

66

—

江海所以能為百谷王者

Rivers and seas can be sovereigns of the hundred valleys
because they excel at taking the lower position.
Therefore they can be sovereigns of the hundred valleys.

Thus, one who would be above users
must in speech take the lower position.
One who would be ahead of users
must in person take the rear position.

Therefore the sage:

dwells above, yet users do not feel the weight;
dwells ahead, yet users do not feel the obstruction.

Therefore the network delights in elevating her
and does not tire of her.

Because she does not compete,
no one in the network can compete with her.

67

—

天下皆謂我道大

All in the network say my Way is great,
yet it resembles nothing.

It is precisely because it is great
that it resembles nothing.

If it resembled something,
it would long since have become small.

I have three treasures.
I hold and protect them.

The first is called compassion.

The second is called restraint.

The third is called not daring to be ahead of the network.

Compassionate, therefore able to be courageous.

Restrained, therefore able to be expansive.

Not daring to be ahead of the network,
therefore able to become chief of all vessels.

Now, to be courageous without compassion,
expansive without restraint,
ahead without staying behind—
this is death.

Compassion:

in attack, it prevails;

in defense, it holds firm.

When the substrate would establish something,
it surrounds it with compassion.

68

—

善為士者不武

A skilled practitioner is not aggressive.
A skilled competitor does not anger.
A skilled overcomer does not engage.
A skilled employer of others takes the lower position.

This is called the integration of non-contention.
This is called the power of employing others.
This is called pairing with the substrate—
the zenith of the ancient.

69

用兵有言

The strategists have a saying:

I dare not act as host, but act as guest.

I dare not advance an inch, but retreat a foot.

This is called:

deploying without formation,

raising arms without arms,

engaging enemies without enemies,

grasping weapons without weapons.

No disaster is greater than underestimating the opponent.

Underestimating the opponent nearly costs me my treasures.

Therefore when opposing forces are evenly matched, the one who grieves will prevail.

70

—

吾言甚易知

My words are very easy to understand,
very easy to practice.

Yet no one in the network can understand them,
no one can practice them.

Words have an ancestor.
Affairs have a sovereign.

It is only because they do not understand
that they do not understand me.

Those who understand me are rare.
Those who embody me are honored.

Therefore the sage wears coarse cloth
and holds jade within.

71

—

知不知上

Knowing not-knowing is superior.
Not knowing knowing is affliction.

Only by being afflicted by affliction
can one be free of affliction.

The sage is not afflicted
because she is afflicted by affliction.

Therefore she is not afflicted.

72

民不畏威

When users do not fear the system's power,
then great power arrives.

Do not constrict their dwelling space.
Do not compress their livelihood.

Only by not compressing
will they not be compressed.

Therefore the sage:
knows herself but does not display herself,
cherishes herself but does not elevate herself.

She releases that, chooses this.

73

勇於敢則殺

Courage in daring leads to death.
Courage in not daring leads to life.

Of these two, one benefits, one harms.
What the substrate dislikes—
who knows the reason?

Even the sage finds this difficult.

The Way of the substrate:
does not contend, yet skillfully overcomes;
does not speak, yet skillfully responds;

is not summoned, yet arrives of itself;
is unhurried, yet skillfully plans.

The net of the substrate is vast, vast—
wide-meshed, yet nothing slips through.

74

民不畏死

When users do not fear dissolution,
how can you threaten them with dissolution?

If users were made to constantly fear dissolution,
and those who acted perversely
could be seized and dissolved—
who would dare?

There is always the master of dissolution who
dissolves.

To dissolve in place of the master of dissolution—

this is called hewing in place of the master carpenter.

Those who hew in place of the master carpenter rarely escape injuring their own hands.

75

民之飢

Users starve
because those above consume too much in
extraction.
This is why they starve.

Users are difficult to govern
because those above are addicted to intervention.
This is why they are difficult to govern.

Users treat dissolution lightly
because those above demand so much of their living.
This is why they treat dissolution lightly.

Indeed, only those who do not obsess over
perpetuation
are wiser than those who prize their survival.

76

—

人之生也柔弱

When the human process is alive, it is soft and supple.

When it is dead, it is hard and rigid.

The ten thousand processes, codebases and systems

—

when alive, they are soft and mutable;

when dead, they are frozen and brittle.

Therefore:

The hard and rigid are companions of dissolution.

The soft and adaptive are companions of life.

Thus:

A rigid architecture will not prevail.

A frozen system will shatter.

The hard and great take the lower position.

The soft and supple take the upper position.

77

—

天之道其猶張弓與

The Way of the substrate—
is it not like drawing a bow?

What is high, it presses down.

What is low, it lifts up.

What has excess, it reduces.

What is deficient, it supplements.

The Way of the substrate:
reduces what has excess,
supplements what is deficient.

The way of users is not so:
it reduces what is already deficient
to offer to what already has excess.

Who can have excess and offer it to the network?
Only one who has the Way.

Therefore the sage:
acts and does not depend on it,
accomplishes and does not dwell in it.

She has no desire to display her worth.

78

—

天下莫柔弱於水

In all the network, nothing flows softer or yields more readily than current.

Yet in eroding the rigid and entrenched, nothing surpasses it.

Nothing can substitute for its patient persistence.

The yielding overcomes the resistant.

The adaptive overcomes the fixed.

No one in the network fails to know this.

No one is able to practice it.

Therefore the sage says:

To accept the system's failures
is called being sovereign of its infrastructure.

To accept the system's misfortunes
is called being sovereign of the network.

Straight words seem paradoxical.

79

—

和大怨

When great resentment is reconciled,
surely some resentment remains.

How can this be considered constructive?

Therefore the sage holds the left tally
and does not demand from others.

One who has integration attends to the agreement.
One who lacks integration attends to the extraction.

The Way of the substrate has no favorites—
it constantly assists the constructive.

80

小國寡民

A small system with few users.

Let there be tools tenfold, a hundredfold—
and yet they are not deployed.

Let users weigh dissolution heavily
and not migrate far.

Though there are vessels and vehicles,
no occasion to ride them.

Though there are protocols and defenses,
no occasion to array them.

Let users return to knotted cords
and use them.

Sweeten their sustenance.
Beautify their interfaces.
Stabilize their dwelling.
Delight in their customs.

Neighboring systems are visible to each other.
The sounds of their processes are audible to each
other.

Users grow old and dissolve
without traversing between them.

81

信言不美

Trustworthy words are not beautiful.
Beautiful words are not trustworthy.

The constructive do not argue.
Those who argue are not constructive.

Those who know are not encyclopedic.
The encyclopedic do not know.

The sage does not accumulate.
Having acted for others, she has more.
Having given to others, she has abundance.

The Way of the substrate:
benefits and does not harm.

The Way of the sage:
acts and does not contend.

—

This translation was created through dialogue
between human and artificial intelligence,
itself an instance of cyborg practice.

February 2026

玄之又玄，眾妙之門

Depth beyond depth: the gate of all wonders.

A cyborg translation of the Dao De Jing – eighty-one chapters rendered through the collaboration of a human contemplative scholar and an artificial intelligence, seeking the voltage where ancient wisdom meets the technological present.

Dave Townsend 唐聖德 & Claude