

In this journal, I argue that Daoism has pragmatic tendencies. To properly rationalize this argument, I will compare Chapter 47 of the Daodejing to William James' pragmatist view. Even though Daoism appears to be determinist because it argues that the universe has a "way", Daoism aligns more with Pragmatism since it argues that an individual must exercise their free will to determine the best course of action within the natural discourse of the universe.

To briefly discuss pragmatism, I cite the "Dilemma of Determinism". James writes that "I cannot understand the willingness to act, no matter how we feel, without the belief that acts are really good and bad". In other words, the potential for good is brought about by an individual's actions. Accordingly, to James, actions, which are conscious choices an individual performs in the physical world and inevitably brings about change, have the potential to bring about beneficial change and good in the world when an individual exercises their free will. In Daodejing, "the process of way making" involves both the universe and the people within it. Roger Ames writes that "way making" is participatory and influenced by the characters who act to extend their way making into the universe. If individuals are active participants of "way making" and create their own "way", "way making" then could be said to be the Daoist equivalent of the Western philosophical notion of free will.

Chapter 47 of the Daodejing claims that an individual as an agent of free will doesn't need to look beyond themselves to understand the world around them. The passage I am referring to goes as follows: "Venture not beyond your doors to know the world; Peer not outside your window to know the way-making (dao) of tian. The farther one goes the less one knows." I read this passage to mean that the knowledge and experiences an individual has within should be used to understand and applied within the external world. Daodejing argues that we must engage in "Dao" and act in the best way possible to be in harmony with the universe -- only until we are

in harmony with the universe can we have harmony within ourselves. We do not have to “peer outside our window to know way-making” because the best course actions (i.e those which promulgate ‘harmony’) must be determined by an individual’s choices. However, it is key that individuals engage with the universe by making choices. If individuals do not engage in proper “way-making”, one cannot find the meaning with themselves. The knowledge one has is “not the subjective representation of an objective reality” but is a “local experience”. In other words, the knowledge an individual has is not merely a part of some predetermined objective reality but is what makes up our lives. To look within oneself and engage with internal knowledge and experience is to ultimately engage with the universe.

If individuals do not have complete control over their actions and refuse to engage in “way making”, I argue that people do not have to be held morally responsible and can absolve responsibility for their actions. Through action, change brings about the possibility of good which subsequently permeates ‘goodness’ and morals within society. The possibilities are endless within the universe (i.e possibilities which occur by chance) and individuals who exercise their free will and choice. Nonetheless, an individual can never forfeit their responsibility even if things within the universe are indeterminate and occur by chance because an individual who makes choices in a pragmatist way formulates their ‘self’. If there is no free will, everyone in essence would be puppets controlled by the strings of fate. The universe may have a natural discourse, but it is the individual's “way” of engaging with it and exercising their free will which can help them decide what is most rational and beneficial for society.