

## **The Tao of the Triangles: Bridging the Individual, Government, and Reality**

The physical sciences at their highest intellectual levels in the 20th century were dominated by the search for a unifying theory between the theory of relativity, which promulgated rules for the great objects of the universe, and the theories of quantum mechanics, which proposed new rules governing sub-atomic physics. Their perceived incompatibility has been the subject of many years of debate among the world's leading scientists.

In a somewhat analogous way, the same was needed for the social sciences, but they are much more difficult because the free will of the people differs greatly from the objectivity of physical science. Nonetheless, there are parallels worthy of study as to how this project can be approached to at least discover common ground and threads of understanding across cultures.

In Eastern philosophy there is the concept of the "Tao" or as it is translated in the West, "the Way," which has many definitions but effectively is an effort to bring unity and enlightenment between the individual and the natural whole. It is a concept of balance and understanding. While it is more identified with Daoism (Taoism) attributed to Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu (with the Tao Te Ching and the Chuang-tzu), which look to finding the basic rules that organize man and the universe or nature, it is a concept that is in many other writings of the East because it is really a search for balance and harmony. In the West philosophers such as C. S. Lewis had their own Tao. Adam Smith, the father of markets with his "invisible hand" of *The Wealth of Nations* focused upon self-interest. But his life's main work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, was a Tao in its own right of how different things balanced. Stability is the value sought of such concepts, so issues such as order, balance, and harmony are key to their organizing principle.

The question is what can we learn from this set of concepts in how to understand and define an organizing theory that can help humanity work together in a coming set of probable crises as unsustainable trends reach climax. We cannot greatly affect the laws of nature; we can only understand them and use their reality in giving us guidance in our decisions. We can only affect how we work as a unit, so our unofficial Tao is to look at the relationship between the individual and the government that is the unit that sets the policy under which he lives and determines his individual dignity. There are many theories of philosophy, but all come from different eras with different levels of technology and political theory refinement so they are not as applicable in an exact form. But lessons can be learned from them and mistakes avoided in the Moral Hazard of public policy. While we might outline these theories and identify their sources to put them in the proper context, they are individualized as to ideas and often meant slightly different things in their day. Aristotle often talked of virtue in his books on ethics. Although virtue had some of the connotation of values we have today, it focused much on excellence as virtue because the time had a different focus.

One of the important developments that deserve the careful attention of the West today is the evolution of the Harmonious Society in China, which was recently placed into its Constitution. This comment is in large part a search for this notion of balance and proper organizing principle and is primarily centered in the mission of their major social research and executive training organization, the Central Party School, which studies

strategic options from all over the world. It is a very important development because it represents the intellectual pinnacle, bringing together brilliant scholars with long-term visions with practical reaction because of its impact on government policy. Theory can often be pure, but ineffective, so the two considerations must be complementary. (The rules of the nature of a Tao set the reality for the governing unit of the people.)

China has three principle streams of religious or philosophical thoughts that inform individual goals in life—Confucianism (Philosophy), Daoism (Taoism), and Buddhism—but its culture is a synthesis mainly of Confucianism, which focused on teaching government officials ethics and competence so they could serve as models for the people. The Daoism (Taoism) of Lao-tzu added the skepticism that you often had unintended consequences and Legalism that is a bit more realistic in part paralleling the theories of Machiavelli on reward and punishment shaping conduct.

The point is there is a blend of theories, but both idealism and realism are needed in shaping policy. That is a given. The problem is how to develop a theory that makes the best balance for the longer-term interest for the most common good while protecting the rights and dignity of all. This brings to the forefront the necessary understanding of important considerations for man's dignity and equality and also their limitations. There must be some rules. If we had total free will there would be chaos, but what are the limits and nature of those rules? Equality is the key consideration of this concern with the individual component of the Tao. It is the essence of fairness, which keeps harmony. The individual wants as much independence and dignity as he can have as a trait of human instinct. Fairness would seem to be total equality of outcome. But this conflicts with the reality of the laws of nature in many ways. I would like to be treated equally with Yao Ming in salary and contract, but it is highly unlikely that would be the case since the laws of economics and nature recognize that scarcity of a product like talent gives it much greater value. So equality must be restricted to at least equal opportunity to match the realities of nature.

This leads to a very critical issue. People are equal in their rights and dignity, but ideas (often realities of nature) are not equal. Some are much more important than others to the ultimate well being of society and the individual. This is the effect of the limits of the natural law of the Tao. So we must consider both sets of interests as we look at options and their intended and unintended consequences. The equality of individuals is bottom up in direction; the prioritization of importance in ideas is top down. Yet they ultimately work into balance through the natural laws' reality. The question is whether you can get a better and more stable balance with the greatest possible dignity for the individual.

This is why the current fixation with “political correctness” can be so devastating if not fully understood. Issues of political correctness are usually very important individually and deserve support, but when they distort thought on the ultimate importance of ideas they have significant consequences. They can often focus on relatively unimportant issues for the long term and draw all attention from the critical issues that are ignored until it is too late for crisis has greatly limited options. They often take place in political theory by extensions of good intentions. Communism started with the focus on the necessity of one greater virtue on equality that was separated out of the balance of the Tao. But its singular or equality focus in more extreme led to good intentions being gradually counterproductive in the lost sense of human nature and the

natural laws of markets and competitiveness that come from the innovation of an incentive based society.

The new Harmonious Society seems to be an approach that is seeking the balance of the more complete Tao. Capitalism has had its own problems with excesses. Adam Smith talked of the benefits of self-interest, but greed and the corruption it often brings in the extreme are an extension of the problems of markets that do not have the internal ethics necessary. They became counterproductive to markets because they limit its key competition. The West is seeking more balance in a Tao that reemphasizes the common good over the excesses of the few.

The world has moved through eras of the dominance of the three great societal forces (or powers)—economics, politics, and culture. In the 1960s, politics dominated with Kennedy-Johnson, Khrushchev, and Mao. That era of Capitalism versus Collectivism changed when technology gave great benefit to market systems, and the world had to adopt competitive adjustments. Reagan and Thatcher brought economics to the forefront in the West, Deng in China transformed thought, and Gorbachev adapted Russia. But that economic era is now moving to the Cultural era wherein corruption and terrorism, the excesses of economics and politics, boosted by globalization and shortages, are forcing changes in approach. New ways must be found to solve problems and the cultural approach requires an understanding of the forces fighting within it for dominance of the culture—conscience or convenience. They will always both be present, but the nature of the society is dominated by one or the other.

Government has much regulation to try to control corruption. But the more regulation often the more opportunity for corruption, so you have to develop a culture of conscience and individual responsibility rather than dependence to ultimately solve the problem. That is necessary in all the considerations of government if you are to avoid Moral Hazard and limit the political correctness issues of the time to distant from the ultimate issues.

If this is a modern battle, how do you develop the leadership to wage it constructively? John Kenneth Galbraith, a thoughtful social critic, concluded that all great leaders have had one characteristic in common: the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time. But the fundamental issue is probably not responsiveness to their anxiety, but the education of the people on what their true concerns and priorities should be. It is not a cult of personality or celebrity, but a trust built on reason and accountability in pursuit of a vision. That requires conscience rather than convenience to transform society because you must change society not just adapt to it.

However, the reality of the often-perverse incentives of government is that they work far differently because their focus of the government is and will always be short term and fixed on the mood of the people. As a result, the next election matters in the West, and stability has priority in the East. So these realities will trump grand theory unless it is built into a realistic power base. That is what is greatly lacking in the world today. Good government requires an educated population to appreciate and support it. The materialistic benefits of money from government often overcome this concern of the people because there is little benefit in being for ethics or common good. If people appreciate a system of thought that gives clarity to self-interest and the benefits of the common good, it imposes a base discipline on how they think and even instinctively

react. Ideas have power and if they are allied with another power base there will be a political leadership that will push them in self-interest. Conscience is powerful among the average people when they work on a local level because it affects relationships and how things are accomplished. But as one rises in levels of power, arrogance, financial considerations, and election burdens, all work to change the nature of leadership to the convenience model, which is extremely powerful and usually dominates. The answer to that is to use convenience to help conscience by building a culture that appreciates competence and conscience to the point that it becomes the political power of those rising in leadership. Unfortunately, this is a very difficult thing to do and can only occur by finding common ground in ideas and a willingness to sacrifice over time. It will happen in the future only if crisis demands change, which is usually the catalyst as people try to seek a new approach.

China is being more preemptive with their problems, while America is showing dissatisfaction with its current trends and seeking alternatives. The rest of the world is in a similar state. So if we are to try to take the significant considerations of reality to the governing unit along with the understanding of the necessity of preserving individual dignity, how should we choose an overriding organizing set of principles to bring these into balance in a modern world? The answer is different for different societies, but they do have many common threads. A primary consideration is to determine what it is that shapes the nature of man and affects conscience vs. convenience. Many in history adhere to the concept of legalism, reward and punishment, or an environmental factor produced by the nature of the times. We often refer to them as the realists. On the other hand, the idealists believe that man has an internal goodness that can be developed and asserted if it is taught to be appreciated. I think the latter is more realistic. The environment determines a great deal, but if one examines the Chinese reaction after its recent earthquake, the reaction of the world after the September 11th terrorism, and the charity after the floods in Southeast Asia, it is evident that men have a natural understanding of their obligations to others. There is much evil in the world, but there is also great charity and goodness. It is the development of this good that in many ways should be the goal of society through its institutions.

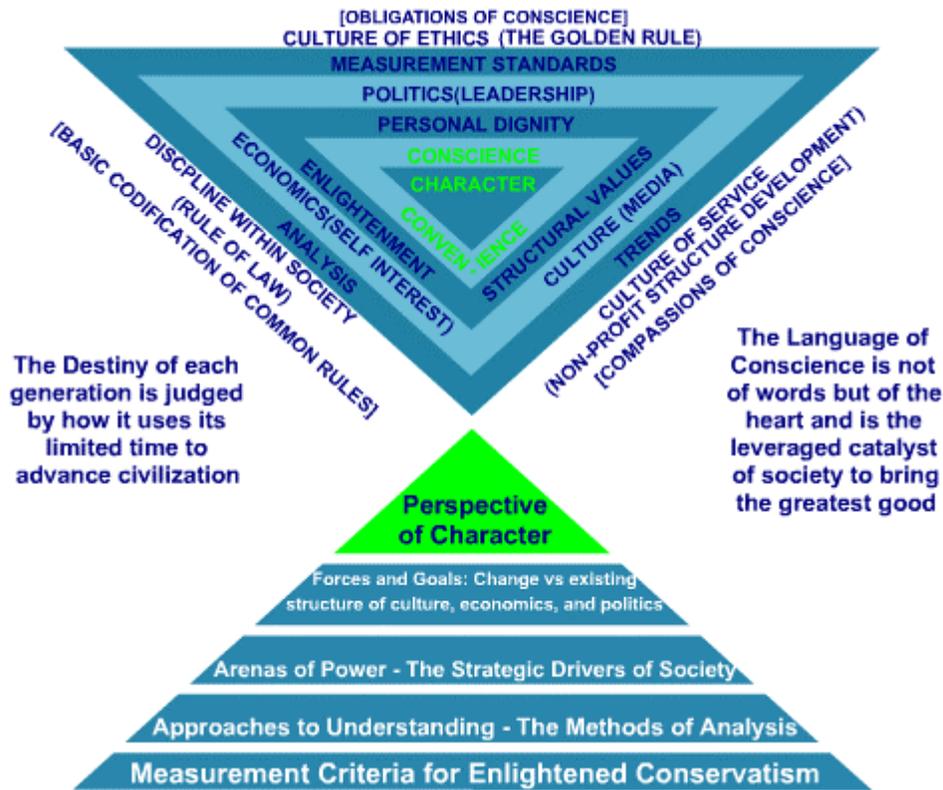
The historical defense of these concepts come both from philosophers like Immanuel Kant who looked at man as more logically understanding and developing these values, and the more spiritual defenses of writers like C. S. Lewis who studied many of the legal and belief systems of history and illustrated all the commonalities of values over time and place. Contemporaries such as James Q. Wilson, Robert George, and J. Budziszewski have all effectively agreed that man is possessed of a moral sense that is "written on the heart," or a natural law. Some believe these are in the universal law as it is constructed just like the physical laws but are often distorted because we have free will. Others believe as Lewis that they have a divine component. His defense of God when challenged that there was unfairness in the world was to take the logic that if you did not have goodness in you, how could you recognize the unfairness. You do not know a line is crooked unless you can recognize a straight line.

So the creation of a culture that has a balance to reality but a push toward conscience as opposed to convenience because it instills individual responsibility and favors the common good succeeds as an organizing principle. That leads to the creation of the Triangles and the Language of Conscience Series. To bring cultural change you

need a different type of leadership. James Macgregor Burns' 1978 book, *Leadership*, identified two basic types. One is transactional leadership where there is an exchange often based on trade offs among competing interests—budget negotiations, jobs for votes, or similar situations of the traditional power relationship. Burns' second concept, transformational leadership, is more complex because it creates a vision and focuses on the needs and motivation (the personal dignity in the Triangles) of the followers. It builds a mutual trust from common purpose and a commitment to unity. It also has the strength of making followers into leaders. (This is the creation of the “Uncommon Men” or Confucian “Gentlemen.”) It is the last concept to which the Triangles were designed. The Triangles do not try to tell the answers but just help to focus on the questions that build mutual understanding. They train followers to be leaders through education and building of common trust.

One example of the comparative relationships of the Triangles might be the cultural differences in leadership between the East and West. In the East leadership is more consensus and less bold with humility as a cultural value and sayings such as “the nail that sticks up gets hammered down” or in China “the tallest tree gets most of the wind.” Cultural approaches for harmony help shape the style of leadership. The West is more short-term results oriented creating celebrity and in cases arrogance. Both styles have negatives and positives. Western top-down aggressive leadership helps innovation and change. Eastern conservatism helps eliminate bad decisions. The modern world requires both. In the Triangles you eliminated the singular arrogance of leadership by an easier consensus that was accepted because of an understanding of why change and innovation needed to be incorporated for market competitiveness. You change how people think about an action from being humble to being more sensitive to common goals. The culture adapts while the economy benefits and politics (leadership) is reformed. All the Triangles do is help the common discussions for balance to reshape how people think about the issue from a broad-based perspective. However, change is a force.

The quotations and writings of *The Language of Conscience* are not different from much of historical context. But are synthesized to not only the modern environment but, more importantly, future trends so popular enlightenment is reinforced. You set a context of thought that can have a consistency and sets the context of how decisions are made. The reality is that growth brings complexity, reformation requires simplicity, and so the Triangles serve as a thoughtful matrix. They are presented here in English.



If you do not have a set of guidelines when you talk to others, you seldom have success in serious discussions. But equally important is attitude going into the discussion. The Triangles provide order to discussion, but this focus on conscience to build trust is equally critical.

An example would be how to convey information if you were trying to buy a house in a difficult market while you have to sell yours. The price that is desired for the new house is too high, and you are worried about selling your house. After you have done the research as to the problems with appraisals and market decline, you can go to the other owner and take an approach of offering an option to purchase in a month if you can sell your house in that time and giving him an escrow, but you need to reach a price for his house. You have two basic options with him, be brutally frank as an opposing party or find a common interest and try to blend thought. In the first you can tell he is far above true market price. All that is wrong with his house valuation (and his house) is how he has to sell because of the declining market, and you are the best offer he will get. Probably this will offend him and get a negative reaction. Or, alternatively, you can go to him and say you would really like to work with him and find a situation where neither of you make money “off each other” but “with each other.” You tell him what you have done on the research on your house with the most effective broker in the neighborhood, and how you have made arrangements to finance a new house if you have the equity from a sale. You are serious and would like to get an option from him, and you are willing to give an earnest money option with a fee. But the key is that you need to move quickly because you see dangers in the market both with declining prices and the freezing of the credit market to potential buyers, so to you speed is critical. The price of his house is the determinant factor to make a deal work. You will sacrifice, but reality probably makes

him sacrifice also to accomplish the common end. In this way he gets the information not in a threatening way, but in facts with mutual understanding, and will accept the logic and reality much more easily. You then explain what you learned in how appraisals may be too high for some houses comparatively and why. This lets you question and lower his price not out of badgering but logic. If he is going to do a deal, your chances are much better. He has an option of a possible deal but reality is now in the mix in a form he appreciates as opposed to a take it or leave it offer. You have lost little because the strategy of the approach has at least let you present the only deal you would take, doing it in a much more thoughtful approach. You have set a context of solving common problems and focusing on the problem not talking at each other negatively in a situation. It is the case that makes the distinction of the winner-winner scenario or the “zero sum game” belief that any gain he gets is from your loss. The Triangles focus as much on trying to create a positive context as they do logical wisdom. No matter how good answers may be they have to be implemented. In public policy a parallel is the theory of choice of growth or division of the pie. Which, under convenience is usually an argument of taking more from someone else’s piece versus the conscience of all growing bigger pieces by concentrating on expansion of the pie rather than division. Division usually means losing the principles that make it grow and substituting a different organizing principle.

It is in this context that the Triangles were created to blend the individual and government (or natural reality). Cultural context is critical because it sets the stage for how things are judged or in an international world how they are understood if translated. Accurate translation and understanding must have the context in which the concepts are presented. If the Lord’s Prayer started with “Our Judge” rather than “Our Father,” it would be interpreted quite differently. If you look at most famous writings that have affected society, they are not often as much definitions but set the context. Confucius is known for the Analects, which are mainly a collection of sayings. The Bible and the Koran give guidance as to ideas that are organizing principles that can be adapted to the times.

As to the Triangles, they can best be viewed much as with the evolution of the level of games. Tic Tac Toe is basic as a game with a few squares and pieces. But it evolves into checkers, which has more pieces and more rules but the same squares and game concept. Then it evolves into chess, which is much more complicated, but has the same basic squares and pieces. For the Triangles in the interplay of conscience versus convenience, the objective is really the search for character and individual responsibility, the places where the organizing principle begins. It is the province of the idealists who believe that man can be taught and guided. It must be the dominant theme that gives us context, but we must look to reality and the natural laws in determining the balance in the Tao the Triangles create.

Forces are the basis of reality. The key forces are change and the status quo. They are what affect stability itself and the rate and degree of change in stability. So they must be studied and understood and the probable consequences of their effect and duration evaluated. But their effect on stability and the system of the Tao is best judged on the impact on personal dignity. This is where the Tao of the individual must be represented in his equality, and the best means of keeping stability is to appeal to the fairness within men that they wish at least equal opportunity and equal rights and dignity that they would

grant to other men. If there is not stability and significant change, the rate of change is often less important than the direction if they see their family will be a beneficiary of their work. This comes from the installation of conscience and its parts both obligation and compassion. Conscience also allows sacrifice for the future.

The next issues in the understanding of the reality of nature are in understanding the three great powers that cause the change and are affected by it. Economics, Politics, and Culture all have crucial roles and understanding their powers to influence incentives and inter-relationships to compensate for each other's weaknesses and strengths is critical. Each society may have very different characteristics from others in these rules and regulations and form, but whether conscience is present in them is the key.

The third level is the necessity of making decisions based on facts that give evidence to a competence that can provide confidence and educate the people was to the available options. Analytics, or truth from facts, is the basic key, but it must have two other critical considerations. Second is measurement or prioritization because in dealing with ideas we have noted they are not equal. Some will have much greater effect than others. Third is the understanding and study of trends. There is a great difference between changes that are cyclical and may self correct to a degree and change that is structural and is long term in nature. Time is a great change agent, and it is essential that vision be long range. While these are generic components that are not new, the problem is that they are seldom actually used as a composite to find a Tao for government or for working between societies in a world that will require serious discussion. Transformational leadership needs a process both to build common goals, but also to agree on the facts so that tactics are consistent with strategy. Political correctness, hypocrisy, arrogance, and self-interest are just a few of the impediments to serious discussion and the seriousness of the times will demand order.

The Triangles also envision a mix of perspective of thought for a balanced judgment since a lawyer or a philosopher thinks in different terms than an engineer or a CEO. Legislatively based Senators, for example, have different focus than executive oriented governors. A blend of not only knowledge but also expertise on theory and execution is required since both are necessary and complimentary.

There are many seminars but most are academic or protocol. Serious cooperation usually means defined discussion well prepared and refined over time in a certain context. The military approach to reality is very appropriate here. You need what is called a Warrior's honor for real success. It combines integrity with power and cooperation with strength that aids commitment. People have definite self-interests. You can talk with them and work with them in common intent, but reality is that you also are concerned as to what happens if others change in nature. So you evaluate what is their capacity to hurt you in the military, business, or politics. So discussions need to be comparisons on all the above items because they are very different as a package than just an individual part. They set the context that both sides understand in serious discussion how they need to be candid about what their concerns are.

However, the ultimate Chess of the Triangles is in the final set of ideas relating to these critical components of culture. To create an understanding of how policies being developed need to go back to the concerns of what the policy does to add or minimize the Moral Hazard in the creation of a culture of responsibility is the basis of strength of any society. The final level returns the thought to the individual and his dignity even though

the realities of the natural laws have been added to the process in the center step. The three components of the Triangles' culture are critical to understand if you are to instill values in transcending generations. First is the culture of law and how it is enforced. This is the common protection we have and comes from the existing cultural value we will jointly protect. How we change these laws often depends on how well the people are educated since they are restrictions on the common man, but also are his greatest protection.

The second culture, that of the obligation of conscience or morality, is accomplished in part by an understanding of the Golden Rule of doing unto others as you would have them do to you, which creates the sense of obligation beyond that required by law. It is the obligation code that Confucius promoted in the creation of a society of Gentlemen. It is what we do because it is right and moral to do it. It is an unenforceable but required obligation of civilization such as courtesy. It determines the amount of law necessary because it affects what people will do among themselves to enforce the unenforceable issues of morality through face and the culture. The third and final culture to be developed is compassion, or what we do for others without the expectation of return to us. It is the service in nonprofits that take the hardness from the market system and develop this charity and sense of individual responsibility, common good leadership, and humility to the service of others that builds the individual responsibility and character with which we started.

We move from an organizing principle of conscience, to the reality of nature, to the reinforcement of those balanced policies to develop the culture that set the context. The Triangles simply place the necessities of the creation of such a balance or Tao in a common format. The basic strength in that growth in all areas has added layers of complexity and interconnected relationships. Change is very difficult on a piecemeal basis. Therefore, to reach a goal each decision needs a simpler, coordinated vision to help restructure. Since stability is the key and the fairness of conscience helps create it, this Tao of choices helps any reformation at almost any level.

Each user will have his own opinions. Those that use it will refine it, those that do not would be asked to develop their own if they can do it more effectively rather than criticize what others believe. It is an effort to bring out the best in man although any presentation of values stirs emotion. The key is whether a great enough nucleus of thought and use can build support for its method. In many ways, it is simply a vehicle to convey ideas to the next generation. If it assists in a common conversation and context, it will enable the most critical ideas and values to be passed on and their importance fully appreciated. Many define history by the great men of each era and their impact, but reality rests on the great ideas that emerge and transcend history. Culture, or what is passed forward is the power of history.