

## Notes on *The Tao of Pooh*

“Pooh just is.” He doesn’t think too much, worry, or plan.

### “The *How* of Pooh?”

“The Vinegar Tasters”:

Confucians see the world as an imperfect place in need of being ordered by human beings.

Buddhists see the world as a place full of suffering that should be rejected.

Taoists see the world as a naturally harmonious place that should be embraced and enjoyed for what it is.

From the Taoist perspective, Confucian thinking is flawed because natural laws should be accepted and obeyed; attempts to impose an outside, artificial order only create conflict and discomfort. Being in harmony with natural laws leads to “happy serenity.”

### “The Tao of *Who*?”

Those who think too intellectually or try too hard (too self-consciously), like Rabbit, make things more complicated and difficult; those who think simply and follow their instincts (the pots of honey “calling” Pooh) come up with easy and practical solutions quite naturally.

Following the natural order of one’s self (one’s natural personality and inclinations) means being an “uncarved block” (樸) with nothing forced or artificial in one’s behavior. If you try to analyze and define yourself, your behavior is no longer natural and spontaneous.

### “Spelling Tuesday”

The goal of life should not be to analyze the world from an intellectual distance, but to live in it and be a part of it; Taoism emphasizes direct experience instead of scholarly knowledge.

“Knowledge for the sake of knowledge” leads to complications and problems in life instead of simple enjoyment.

### “Cottleston Pie”

“Everything has its own place and function.” When we appreciate things for what they are and don’t try to force them to be or do something else, we achieve harmony and avoid conflict and difficulty. Likewise, we should accept who we are instead of trying to be something we’re not. According to Taoism, we should always try to “go with the flow.”

Qualities that may seem to be weaknesses or limitations in one context can be strengths or advantages in another. Piglet’s small size may be seen a weakness, but he can easily go places that others can’t. We are all useful as long as we appreciate our natural abilities.

### “The Pooh Way”

**Wei Wu Wei (為無為):** “doing without meddlesome, combative, or egotistical effort”

If you do things self-consciously, you become tense, you make things more complicated than they should be, you try to force your own way on them, and you fail to see easy and obvious solutions. In other words, you make yourself unable to go with the flow.

Overthinking also leads to a failure to pay attention to what one is doing at the moment, and that’s how many accidents happen.

“Work *with* circumstances” instead of against them; accept that conditions may not be what you want or expect and adapt to them.

Eeyore likes the gifts of the empty pot and the burst balloon because he appreciates them for what they are and doesn’t focus on what they *aren’t*, what he might have expected them to be.

“Fight fire with water.” Don’t resist something directly; use its own nature to your advantage.

### “Bisy Backson”

Bisy Backsons are “type A personalities”—people who are unable to relax and enjoy life but instead must be constantly doing something. They always focus on the future goal of what they’re doing instead of enjoying the moment, so they’re always stressed out.

(Note: Following Taoist ideals doesn’t mean that you can’t ever have goals. What’s important is the mindset you have in achieving those goals: not worrying about them, attaching too much importance to them, or focusing on the future at the expense of the present. Just let them happen through an enjoyable process instead of “going after them” or forcing them to happen.)

The way American Indians lived in harmony with the land instead of forcing it to grow a crop that it wasn’t suited to is a good example of the opposite of a Bisy Backson.

Bisy Backsons think in terms of fighting and overcoming instead of growing and developing.

### “That Sort of Bear”

The stonecutter story shows that everyone and everything has its own unique strength, value, and place in the universe, and nothing has a greater inherent value than anything else. We should all learn to recognize, value, and believe in our own worth and abilities. (And we should treat other people and things with respect, recognizing *their* worth.)

**Caring (慈)** is the source of courage and wisdom because it is when we care about something that we are motivated to ignore our fear and to seek understanding.

### “Nowhere and Nothing”

“To go nowhere and do nothing is the first step towards finding peace in the Tao.” If we cease to impose our will on the world but appreciate what’s around us, our minds will be peaceful and we will be in harmony with the world.

When Eeyore looks at what’s right in front of him instead of assuming that he must come up with a plan to find his missing tail, he finds it. People who can’t find the glasses that they’re already wearing are an example of the opposite of this principle.

The empty mind is able to perceive things clearly, absorb the situation, and adapt to it. Small children exist in this state naturally because they are not caught up in a mental world of worries and plans and facts and abstractions.

One advantage of an empty mind is that it allows intuition to be felt and allows the subconscious to generate ideas.

The “Great Nothing” cannot be described in words because one grasps it by *being*, not by *thinking*. *Being* puts us in touch with reality; *thinking* separates us from it because it creates an artificial world of abstractions that isn’t *real*.