



Lao Tzu
Born circa 600 BC

If Lao Tzu Met Confucius...



Confucius
Born circa 551 BC

Though Lao Tzu probably lived around the same time near the same place and under the Chou dynasty like Confucius, the philosophies of the two men are quite different. What might a conversation discussing their ideas have been like, had it occurred? Read this skit to find out.

Confucius - Greetings, Old Wise One, Lao Tzu. (*bows slightly*)

Lao Tzu - (*nods in return*) Greetings, young Master. You have made quite a name for yourself in our land.

Confucius - Thank you, Old Sage. You are well known for your wisdom. It is an honor to speak with you.

Lao Tzu - And yet, we do not agree. We see the world and our country in very different ways. Our philosophies are, in fact, opposite on many issues.

Confucius - I am sure that Lao Tzu knows that one of my teachings is to value age, for with age comes wisdom. I believe we should show respect for all, and particularly our elders.

Lao Tzu - And as you elder I appreciate that, however let us move past our polite greetings. As I am certain the Young Teacher knows, I believe that we must follow the natural order of the world. If it were meant that you and I should meet, then it was also meant that we should speak of matters that are important to us. Tell me, Young Master, why do you teach people to strive so hard for an education? Even if they are not striving for wealth, they are still seeking something to be proud about. Is schooling not just one more thing which forces men to compete with each other?

Confucius - I know that the Wise One does not like it when men show pride in their achievements, but you are right in saying that seeking education is unlike seeking wealth. Education makes one superior, not money. It is not only respect that we seek; it is also our own happiness, and education makes us happy.

Lao Tzu - Nature makes me happy. Happiness comes from following the natural order and acting in the moment. Is schooling not just one more thing that forces men to strive to succeed? I believe that striving to succeed makes people unhappy. If we do not strive to succeed, we cannot fail. He who never fails always succeeds, and he who always succeeds is all-powerful and so is happy.

Confucius - Perhaps, but now I have a question for you. I would like to ask about government. As you know, I believe that rulers should keep order. Rulers should care for the people and make decisions that are good for them and in turn, the people will support and obey their rulers. An orderly society is a calmer, safer, and more pleasant place. But you disagree. Could you please explain why?

Lao Tzu - What is more pleasant than lying in a meadow among beautiful flowers? Flowers do not have rules and laws to live by. Animals live their lives without rules, and aren't humans animals? We eat, sleep, breath, live, die, and make laws. The more people try to change the nature of the world, the worse the world becomes.

Confucius - But respectfully, people are not flowers or animals for that matter. Animals have to kill or be killed to survive. We cannot allow people to kill and be killed in our society. We need laws to prevent people from hurting one another.

Lao Tzu - And what if people did hurt other people? Perhaps it would be best to ask why people hurt others. It gets us back to trying to compete. People commit crimes to gain wealth or out of jealousy of others.

Confucius - It is human nature. Everyone in the world would have to think exactly like you to prevent violence, and I don't think that will happen. This is why we need government and laws.

Lao Tzu - The Young Master is correct in saying that we disagree on this subject as I believe that government action just disrupts the natural order of things. So let us move on to another subject. Let us talk about what I call the "Tao" or "Path." My philosophy centers on the individual. I believe that each person has an individual Path through life. You, on the other hand, are concerned far more about what is best for the whole: the family, the town, the country. Can you explain to me what you mean?

Confucius - Again, I must emphasize order in society. We live together in groups, so we must be concerned about other people. We must be courteous, kind, generous, honest, and respectful to others. We should treat others as we ourselves would want to be treated. If we do these things, we can all live together peacefully.

Lao Tsu - But our Path may not be a peaceful one. We must live the life we have been offered to the fullest. Life comes without warning and it can go just as suddenly. We should live our lives so that we have no regrets at the end.

Confucius - Old Sage, it sounds like you are saying that people should "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die." With respect, I must say I think that approach seems very selfish.

Lao Tzu - I do not believe we should be selfish at all. Selfishness means that we are trying to gain something: wealth, food, clothing, education, or such. In fact we should not try to gain anything at all. We should simply accept and appreciate both the good and the bad – yin and yang if you will - and follow our own Path. Our life is ours to enjoy.

Confucius - I fear that we may not agree on any topics at all.

Lao Tzu - That may be true, Young Master, but I have truly enjoyed our conversation. I find it wonderful that our Paths have crossed.

Confucius - This has indeed been an interesting discussion, but now I must be on my way.

Lao Tzu - And I must relax and enjoy what is left of my life. Good-bye, Young Master.

Confucius - Good-bye, Old Wise One.



Both

[illegible]

Directions: Read the two scenarios and suggest what you think Confucius and Lao Tzu might have said should be done in each situation.

Scenario One: Nichole is a 17-year-old junior in high school. She has saved \$5000 from part-time jobs and now wants to buy a car. Her parents disagree and want her to save the money for college.

Confucius-

Lao Tzu-

Scenario Two: A large city wants to build a new ballpark for the baseball team. Many citizens are protesting this because they would have to pay higher taxes to build the multi-million dollar stadium. Others support the plan because it would provide many new jobs and bring in a lot of revenue from ticket sales, hotels, and restaurants.

Confucius-

Lao Tzu-