

UNIVERSIDAD SAN FRANCISCO DE QUITO

**Wu Wei y Programación Neurolingüística:
Un Acercamiento Terapéutico**

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Abstract

The present paper aims at achieving the task of finding enough similarities between a few specific Daoist concepts and the specific tool of Reframing in Neurolinguistic Programming in order to support the thesis that NLP's Reframing can be a very effective tool for experiencing the objective, describable portion of the experience which the Daoist thinkers strive to describe in their texts.

In order to do that, two objectives will be covered.

The first objective is to make a brief review of some important Daoist concepts in Chapter 1 (namely: the concepts of Yin Yang, Wu Wei, and Zi Ran) as well as some important NLP presuppositions and one specific tool from the therapeutic point of view in Chapter 2 (namely: Reframing).

The second objective is to make some comparisons between the concepts studied in Chapters 1 and 2 in order to draw some conclusions that would support the thesis given at the beginning of the present abstract.

Resumen

La presente disertación pretende lograr el objetivo de hallar suficientes similitudes entre unos pocos conceptos Daoistas y la herramienta puntual del Re-encuadre de la Programación Neurolingüística para sustentar la tesis de que el Re-encuadre de la PNL puede ser una herramienta muy efectiva para llegar a experimentar la porción objetivas y describible que los pensadores Daoistas se esfuerzan por relatar en sus textos.

Para lograr esto se cubrirán dos objetivos.

El primer objetivo es el hacer una breve revisión de algunos conceptos Daoistas importantes en el Capítulo 1 (específicamente: los conceptos de Yin Yang, Wu Wei y Zi Ran), así como algunas presuposiciones básicas de la PNL y de una herramienta específica desde el punto de vista terapéutico (específicamente el Re-encuadre).

El segundo objetivo es el hacer algunas comparaciones entre los conceptos estudiados en los Capítulos 1 y 2 para sacar algunas conclusiones que respalden la tesis dada al inicio del presente resumen.

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Introduction

The task of writing the present paper is a difficult one because it deals with two topics that are highly misunderstood, not to say controversial, among the academic community: NLP and Daoism.

In one hand, ever since Richard Bandler and John Grinder came out, in the decade of 1970, with the opinion that "during these years both practitioners and theoreticians spent much energy and creativity arguing the necessary superiority of one form of psychotherapy over the others"¹, and that therefore it was necessary to find the common trends that would run through all schools of therapy (therefore finding what we could call a Meta-Therapy, or the model on which all therapies are based, whether consciously or unconsciously), Neurolinguistic Programming (from now on referred as NLP) has always had a very polar relationship with therapist all around the globe.

In one side there are the people who regard such an attempt as an interesting one, if not promising to say the least, while in the other side there are other people who consider such project a very ambitious one, not to call it impossible

¹ Bandler & Grinder, "The Structure of Magic I", p. 155

or plainly crazy. Leaving all the sterile theoretic discussions aside, the only observable truth is that NLP seems to be achieving fast, easy, consistent, lasting and side-effect-free success in areas where other professionals (not only in therapy, but now in education, sales, negotiation, and nearly every area of the human experience that involves communication) have been painfully struggling for poor outcomes for decades. Or, to put it in Bandler's own words: "I've been called everything from a charlatan to a genius. Whether they look at me as being really magical or whether they look at me as being a charlatan, the truth is I get results where they got none."²

In the other hand, every time a person starts to get in touch with Daoism, that person is confronted with an apparently paradoxical situation. In one hand, the whole school of thought known in the West as Daoism revolves around one concept -the Dao- from which a whole corpus of knowledge spring. In the other hand, however, the very first sentence in the Dao De Jing -the Daoist cannon per excellence- reads: "The Dao that can be told of is not the eternal Dao."³ So, the person trying to understand Daoism is confronted with the highly difficult situation of trying to learn something from

² Bandler, "The Hypnotist" video, seconds 24 to 34

³ Dao De Jing, Ch. 1, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p. 139

a school of thought whose main topic simply cannot be really studied at all.

While it is true that every person with some experience in Daoism will agree on the fact that the real Dao cannot be studied, the quoted sentence in the previous paragraph also reveals the fact that, if the real Dao cannot be studied, it means that there's what Lao Zi calls "a Real Dao", but also that there are other different concepts of Dao that can indeed be studied. In other words, while it is true that the Unlimited Ultimate Reality of the Real Dao cannot be completely grasped by a limited being such as a human being, it is also true that limited human beings can comprehend certain limited portions of that greater scheme. Thus, the question that arises is, what parts, then, are worthy of being studied?

The answer to that question is not an easy one either. While for some people and purposes some topics may be of interest and use, for different individuals and situations a whole different tier of matters should be covered, and both approaches would be indeed correct. Therefore, the question that really matters for the present paper is to clearly define its main objectives to make it possible to select the

topics and approaches that would serve better to demonstrate the points in question.

Therefore, there are two main objectives that will be covered in the present paper.

The first objective is to make a brief review of some important Daoist concepts in Chapter 1 (namely: the concepts of Yin Yang, Wu Wei, and Zi Ran) as well as some important NLP presuppositions and one specific tool from the therapeutic point of view in Chapter 2 (namely: Reframing).

The second objective is to make some comparisons between the concepts studied in Chapters 1 and 2 in order to draw some conclusions that would support the thesis that, since both Daoism and the parts of NLP specifically studied in this paper have so many similar characteristics, the latter can be a very effective tool for experiencing the objective, describable portion of the experience which the Daoist thinkers strive to describe in their texts.

In other words, since NLP seems to be saying exactly the same thing as the Daoist texts (at least in some extents and at certain matters), then it should be a valid practical tool for recreating the mundane states that are described in those texts.

Of course, since the most observable portion of the human experience is the behavior a person performs, for the present paper the focus of Reframing will be that of attaining the Daoist way of acting known as Wu Wei.

Finally, there's a fact that lies implicitly stated in the previous paragraph: the present paper, under no circumstance, pretends to be a "guide for enlightenment" or a "step by step model" for becoming a Daoist Sage. As Noss & Noss state:

*"The final goal is ecstasy of absorption into the quietude and ultimate truth of the Dao; one cannot push his way into this ecstasy; it must come of itself, in utter spontaneity"*⁴

Therefore, this paper can only be considered as a tool for experiencing some of the more concrete states described in the Daoist texts while the person waits for the experience of the Real Dao to arrive by itself.

In other words, if the Daoist principles described in texts like the Dao De Jing or the Zhuang Zi are the preparation for such "ecstasy of absorption" to take place within the person, then the "fullness of life" that one can experience after achieving a profound change via NLP technology can also be the way to prepare the person for such high absorption.

⁴ Noss & Noss, "Man's Religions", p. 356

Chapter 1: Daoist Concepts Overview

Section A: Yin Yang

One of the most popular concepts regarding Chinese culture - and also one of the most misunderstood ones- is that of the Yin Yang polarity.

The word "Yin"⁵ means, according to the NJStar Chinese translator program: "(in Chinese philosophy, medicine, etc.) yin, the feminine or negative principle in nature; the moon; <meteorology> overcast; shade; north of a hill or south of a river; back; in intaglio; hidden; secret; sinister; of the nether world; <physics> negative; private parts (esp. of the female)."

The word "Yang"⁶ means, according to the same program used before: "the sun; south of a hill or north of a river; in relief; open; overt; belonging to this world; concerned with living beings; positive; (in Chinese philosophy, medicine, etc.) yang, the masculine or positive principle in nature."

The two words used together give the idea of the two ends of a continuum, of two opposites, of two extremes.

⁵ Classic Chinese: 陰, Modern Chinese: 阴, Pinyin: yīn

⁶ Classic Chinese: 陽, Modern Chinese: 阳, Pinyin: yáng

In many other cultures there's also the figure of the pair of opposites (good and evil, light and darkness, cold and heat...), where people are coaxed to pursue good and discard evil. Maybe the most extreme of such cases is Zoroastrism, which "offers a marked division between the good and evil opposites because each one of them exists by itself in an endless antagonism."⁷ Chinese thought, however, is a little different from such point of view.

The first characteristic that makes Yin and Yang different from almost every other pair of opposites is the fact that they exist in a state of tension between them, but instead of being an antagonistic tension, they exist in a tension that tends to achieve balance rather than confrontation. It can also be said that each one of them does what the other cannot do, becoming a Complimentary pair of forces more than an Opposite ones:

"One Yin and one Yang - this is Dao. The passionate union of Yin and Yang and the intercourse between man and woman represent the eternal model of the universe. If Heaven and Earth would not have mixed, how could all beings come to existence?"⁸

For Daoism, both the Yin and Yang are so tied together, so dependent upon each other, that to consider one without the other would be like considering one of those antique

⁷ Cooper, "Yin y Yang", p. 117

⁸ Watts, "El Camino del Dao", p. 70

railroads (not the new, magnetic ones, but rather the old, coal-based ones) to function not with two, but only with one rail: it would be utterly impossible because for a railroad to exist it requires 2 rails, and to dispense of one means that the whole system disappears (or at least stops working and becomes useless) as well. It not only means that the two elements exist individually, but rather that they depend on each other, and that the existence of one of them can only imperatively signify that the other one exists as well:

*"When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty, there arises the recognition of ugliness. When they all know the good as good, there arises the recognition of evil. Therefore: being and non-being produce each other; difficult and easy complete each other; long and short contrast each other; high and low distinguish each other; sound and voice harmonize with each other; front and back follow each other"*⁹

However, no matter how intrinsically related those two opposites are, they maintain a relation of exclusion as well, because one cannot exist as long as the first one prevails. In order for the night to exist, the day must retreat, and for the heat to advance, cold must draw back (a good modern example of this would be the steering wheel of a car: when one side goes up, the other side must go down and vice versa). The previous statement also signifies that one of those forces or energies also have the ability to produce the other because, if the advancement of one means the diminish

⁹ Dao De Jing, Ch. 2, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p. 140

of the other, then the converse is also true: the weakening of one element of the pair means the strengthening of the other, and the fading of the latter means the intensification of the former.

That, in turn, also means that, under extreme circumstances, each component of the pair can become the other if pushed to an extreme:

Calamity is that upon which happiness depends; happiness is that in which calamity is latent. Who knows when the limit will be reached? Is there no correctness? Then the correct again becomes the perverse and the good will again become evil.¹⁰

Of course, the fact that one thing may appear as Yin or as Yang doesn't mean that it is actually completely Yin or absolutely Yang. On the contrary, when we call something "masculine" or "feminine", to use an example, we're only stating that that particular specimen to which we're making a reference has a majority of either Yin or Yang characteristics. Indeed, as it can be seen in the classic Yin Yang diagram, each part has a little of its contrary: white has a dot of black, and black has a dot of white. Or, to continue with the male/female example:

"When we consider them [the yin and yang] as male and female we don't mean so much the male and female individuals, but rather the dominant -but not exclusive- characteristics of each one of the sexes. Obviously, the male has a convex penis and the female

¹⁰ Dao De Jing, Ch. 58, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p.167

*a concave vagina [...] but the female also possesses a convex chest compared to the flat one of the male."*¹¹

Lastly, the previous quote also points out the fact that, if every being in the creation has both a yin and a yang part to it, then we can't really say that there exists a "pure" yin or "pure" yang in nature, but rather that something can be catalogued as yin or yang depending on what we compare them to. In other words, as the classic Chinese story at the end of this section shows, something can be labeled as yin or yang (good or bad, long or short, hot or cold, etc.) depending on what it is compared to: early morning is brighter than the night that just ended, but is pale in comparison to the noon of a clear summer day.

Now, there's one interesting and important implication of this way of viewing the opposites, so different from the one commonly accepted in the west. The main objective of western technology is to favor one aspect of the duality while hindering the other: science has been struggling for centuries to achieve a world where there's health without disease, youth without aging, pleasure without pain, and richness without poverty. However, all these efforts seem to be bringing about more troubles than the ones that are helping to solve because the more the human beings try to

¹¹ Watts, "El Camino del Dao", p. 65

dominate and analyze the world, the more it goes further and further away from humankind: "Idealists (in the moral sense of the word) consider the universe as something different and separated from themselves; that is, as a system of external objects that needs to be overcome."¹² Human beings, under such point of view, tend to considered themselves as "outsiders" of the natural order, or at least as beings who occupy such a high rank in the arrangement of things that common Natural Laws are not applied to them.

The question that arise then is, is the human race exempt of obeying such natural order? The answer is not a difficult one under the Daoist premises: humans are not only affected by such superior laws, but share a greater responsibility than the rest of the "ten thousand beings" because human beings are one of the "four great things in the universe":

*"...Dao is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great. And the king is also great. There are four great things in the universe, and the king is one of them. Man models himself after Earth. Earth models itself after Heaven. Heaven models itself after Dao. And Dao models itself after Nature."*¹³

Human beings, it may even be accurately said, are in a greater danger of infringing the natural laws because men,

¹² Watts, "El Camino Del Dao", p. 64

¹³ Dao De Jing Ch, 25, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p.152; "in this case the king is understood as the representative of man"

due to their desire for knowledge, have forgotten what is natural to them:

*"Only when Dao is lost does the doctrine of virtue arise. When virtue is lost, only then does the doctrine of humanity arise. When humanity is lost, only then does the doctrine of righteousness arise. When righteousness is lost, only then does the doctrine of propriety arise. Now, propriety is a superficial expression of loyalty and faithfulness, and the beginning of disorder. Those who are the first to know have the appearance of Dao, but are the beginning of ignorance."*¹⁴

Such abandonment of the natural role that corresponds to men (abandonment that in turn carried crimes or sins by human doing) was believed by ancient Chinese to be the cause of adverse natural phenomenon that would cause trouble in the world: "Heaven in anger summoned meteors and thunderbolts [...] it was because [its equilibrium] was wanted by something in earth, maybe a human crime."¹⁵

In the end, however, the real Daoist Sage comes to the realization that it's not that human beings are just a part of the Greater Whole, but rather that humans (and every other single being) are in fact one and the same with the Greater Whole, so that the sage regards the world as one with himself:

*One may know the world without going out of doors.
One may see the Way of Heaven without looking through*

¹⁴ Dao De Jing, Ch. 38, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p.158

¹⁵ Noss & Noss, "Man's Religion's", p. 329

*the windows. The further one goes, the less one knows.*¹⁶

As a conclusion, then, it can be stated that the Daoist sage under no circumstance opposes the developing of human skills, technology included, as long as such developments don't lose the insight that the inventor, the invention and the rest of things are, in reality, one and the same thing: "Therefore, the art of living is not considered as something attached to Yang and detached of Yin, but rather as the balance between both of them."¹⁷

This balance is achieved not by a still, close to dead quietude, but rather by a serene cyclic change and alternation of the Yin and Yang in all its manifestations. In this way of viewing things, isolated events cannot be categorized as absolutely "good" or "bad", "short" or "long", or any other pair of opposites because what we regard as one thing can be regarded as something absolutely different if we vary the point of view just a little. That seems to be exactly what Zhuang Zi tries to express when he gives us comparisons and metaphors such as the following:

"If a man sleeps in a damp place, his back aches and he ends up half paralyzed, but is this true of a loach? If he lives in a tree, he is terrified and shakes with fright, but is this true of a monkey? Of these three creatures, then, which one knows the

¹⁶ Dao De Jing, Ch. 47, in Wing-Tsit Chan, p.162

¹⁷ Watts, "El Camino del Dao", p. 65

proper place to live? Men eat the flesh of grass-fed and grain-fed animals, deer eat grass, centipedes find snakes tasty, and hawks and falcons relish mice. Of these four, which knows how food ought to taste? Monkeys pair with monkeys, deer go out with deer, and fish play around with fish. Men claim that Mao-ch'iang and Lady Li were beautiful, but if fish saw them they would dive to the bottom of the stream, if birds saw them they would fly away, and if deer saw them they would break into a run. Of these four, which knows how to fix the standard of beauty for the world?"¹⁸

Not only that, but it is also common that one thing that was initially regarded as good, for example, may end up being a disgrace in disguise, and vice versa, as is shown in the popular Chinese story regarding the old frontiersman that lost his horse, recorded in the "Instructions in the World - Huainan Tzu": when the horse of an old man got lost, all the neighbors went to comfort the old man, but he only replied, "I am not sad; maybe this would bring good fortune." Some time later, the lost horse came back with a stallion, to which his neighbors came to congratulate him, but he only said, "Maybe this thing will change into bad fortune". Some time later, the old man's son was riding the stallion when he fell down and broke his leg; again the neighbors came to comfort the old man, and he replied, "Maybe this will turn into good fortune". Then an invasion took place, so that all of the young men were recruited into the army, but the old man's son got spared because he was lame because of the

¹⁸ Zhuan Zi Ch. 2, in Burton Watson p. 45-46

injury he suffered some time ago when he fell from the horse.¹⁹

Therefore, it may be concluded that the real Sage is the one who not only regards himself and the world as one, but someone who is also able to view things from a higher perspective, different from the everyday-problems point of view: "All the opposites cease to exist as such in the moment in which one considers them from a level higher than the one in which such opposition takes place. The basis for the transformation and the transmutation is the acceptance of the totality of its positive and negative aspects."²⁰

The question, then, is not if such "natural laws" -of which the Yin Yang is just an example- indeed govern nature, nor is it the question whether human beings are affected and can affect the Universe back, because that was a a common belief among Chinese people from great antiquity. Indeed, the idea of a "mutual influence between nature and man" can be found as early as the end of the 12th century B.C.²¹ in writings of the Yin Yang School, where it is said to be a part of the discourse given by the Viscount of Chi to the King Wu of the Chou Dynasty. Such accounts are even said to be based on

¹⁹ Zhao, "Collection of Chinese Idioms and their Stories", p. 279

²⁰ Cooper, "Yin y Yang", p. 19

²¹ Fung Yu-lan, p. 336-337

ideas of about the 20th century B.C.²², which were in turn based in ideas supposedly of Yu, "traditional founder of the Hsia Dynasty, who is said to have lived in the 22nd century B.C."²³

The matter of real interest, provided that there's really a "mutual influence between nature and man", is to find what behavior the wise human being, the Sage, should adopt in order to be in harmony and accord with Nature.

The answer to such question lies in another one of the capital -and also widely misunderstood- Daoist concepts: the Wu Wei.

²² Fung Yu-lan, p. 337-338

²³ Fung Yu-lan, p. 401-405

Section B: Wu Wei and Zi Ran

The first task that should be undertaken is that of analyzing and trying to clearly define what the Daoist understand by Wu Wei.

The word "Wu"²⁴ means, according to the NJStar Chinese translator program: "nothing; nil; not have; there is not; without; not; regardless of; no matter whether, what, etc."

The word "Wei"²⁵ means, according to the same program used previously: "do; act; act as; serve as; become; be; mean; <preposition> (for passive); <formal> <auxiliary> (for question.)"

The term Wu Wei, thus, may seem a term used to indicate that which lacks action, that which is quiet, merely responsive in the best cases or, as usually misunderstood, inactive. The previously statement can be somehow wrongly backed up if some quotes from the Dao De Jing are taken lightly and without further analysis, for example the very well known one in chapter 37:

*Dao invariably takes no action, and yet there is nothing left undone.*²⁶

²⁴ Classic Chinese: 無, Modern Chinese: 无, Pinyin: wú

²⁵ Classic Chinese: 為, Modern Chinese: 为, Pinyin: wéi

²⁶ Dao De Jing, Ch. 37, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p. 158

However, "inaction" is as far from the real Daoist meaning of Wu Wei as noon is of midnight, and that's why the term "no-action" is commonly preferred to depict that very peculiar state which the Daoists describe as "Wu = not having", and "wei = action".

Starting from the fact that Chinese philosophy in its origins in general, and Daoism in specific, are very intermingled with the observation of nature, it sounds only logical to try to find in nature itself some examples of what could be called Wu Wei, and Lao Zi seems to be very specific as to where to look for such examples:

*The softest things in the world overcome the hardest things in the world [...] Through this I know the advantage of taking no action.*²⁷

Therefore, by turning to look at the smallest things in the world, it may be possible to realize the greater truths of the Universe:

*A tree as big as a man's embrace grows from a tiny shoot. A tower of nine storeys begins with a heap of earth. The journey of a thousand li starts from where one stands.*²⁸

However, the metaphor per excellence regarding the Wu Wei way of being is undoubtedly found in water, for water is regarded to be as close as something can be of the Dao:

²⁷ Dao De Jing, Ch. 43, in Wing-Tsit Chan, p. 161

²⁸ Dao de Jing, Ch. 64, in Wing-Tsit Chan, p. 169

The best man is like water. Water is good; it benefits all things and does not compete with them. It dwells in lowly places that all disdain. This is why it is so near to Dao.²⁹

And yet in another passage:

There is nothing softer and weaker than water, and yet there is nothing better for attacking hard and strong things. For this reason there is no substitute for it. The entire world knows that the weak overcomes the strong and the soft overcomes the hard.³⁰

One of the pertinent conclusions that can be derived from the previous quotes is that, for a beginning, it turns out to be quite obvious that Wu Wei, under no circumstance, means lack or absence of action. Indeed, if the previous citations are carefully analyzed, it will be clearly noted that everything, from the "smallest things", to water, to the Sage himself, are indeed executing some kind of actions or movements in a way or another: plants are growing, water is flowing, and humans in accord with the Wu Wei -and Sages per excellence- are doing things and engaging in action, but only in those things that would not be regarded as excessive, capricious or arbitrary:

The sage discards the extremes, the extravagant, and the excessive.³¹

²⁹ Dao De Jing, Ch. 8, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p. 143

³⁰ Dao De Jing, Ch. 78, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p. 174

³¹ Dao De Jing, Ch. 29, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p. 154

And yet in another passage, Zhuang Zi clearly states that there's nothing wrong with doing certain things, as long as those actions don't go against common sense:

Nothing is as good as a boat for crossing water, nothing as good as a cart for crossing land. But though a boat will get you over water, if you try to push it across land, you may push till your dying day and hardly move it any distance at all.³²

Therefore, the Sage does only that which is necessary to achieve a purpose, only that which is sufficient, only that which is in accord with good and common sense, and even when doing so does not feel anything self-important about it:

A good (general) achieves his purpose and stops, but dares not seek to dominate the world. He achieves his purpose but does not brag about it. He achieves his purpose but does not boast about it. He achieves his purpose but is not proud of it. He achieves his purpose but only as an unavoidable step. He achieves his purpose but does not aim to dominate. For after things reach their prime, they begin to grow old, which means being contrary to Dao. Whatever is contrary to Dao will soon perish.³³

But, what is the rule, the measure, against which the Sage can compare himself in order to know that he's not over-doing something and that he's doing only that which is adequate? The answer is, plainly, to do that which does not interfere with the flow of nature, of what is natural to each being - the Zi Ran:

The Heavenly is on the inside, the human is on the outside [...] Horses and oxen have four feet -this is

³² Zhuang Zi Ch. 14, in Burton Watson p. 159

³³ Dao De Jing, Ch. 30, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p. 154

what I mean by heavenly. Putting a halter on the horse's head, piercing the ox's nose -this is what I mean by the human.³⁴

In the previous quote, though, "the Heavenly" is synonym with that which is Natural, and "the human" is synonym with the artificial and the excessive, because to impose the human norm or need on the horse and the ox is to hinder the horse and the ox's nature. Of course, if we'd be talking about the human itself, "the human" would then be synonym of "the heavenly", of the natural.

Just in the same way that it would be impossible to pretend an understanding of what is Yin without taking into account what Yang is, as it was stated in the previous section, it would be impossible to accurately define what Wu Wei means without taking into consideration what Zi Ran is. Nonetheless, the Zi Ran can be understood as the Yin, metaphysical principle of which the Wu Wei is the Yang, physical and concrete human manifestation. Therefore, it is important now to analyze this notion of what Daoism consider to be "natural" for a moment.

Now, in order to validate the momentary digression from the Wu Wei topic to the Zi Ran one, a good reason must be given. That reason is that, for a person to be able to surrender

³⁴ Zhuang Zi Ch. 17, in Burton Watson p. 182-183

itself to the Wu Wei, there must be a profound and complete understanding of what is Natural (that is, in the human nature, as well as in the nature of each being) in order for the human being to trust in Nature and, therefore, be able to surrender to it and to Wu Wei.

That is to say: if a person doesn't understand what is Natural, then that person cannot trust in the universe as a whole, therefore it is impossible to trust in other beings, and lastly it is even impossible even to trust in oneself. In fact, as Watts sharply states, "if you cannot trust in yourself, then you cannot even trust in the distrust you feel about yourself."³⁵ This is the same kind of confidence that Lao Zi seems to have in human beings when he says that:

*I take no action and the people of themselves are transformed. I love tranquility and the people of themselves become correct. I engage in no activity and the people of themselves become prosperous. I have no desires and the people of themselves become simple.*³⁶

Another way to try to understand what is Natural is by looking at the term "De"³⁷. Usually translated as "virtue", according to the NJStar Chinese program, the term means "virtue; morals; moral character; heart; mind; kindness; favour." This "virtue", however, should not be understood as

³⁵ Watts, "El Camino del Dao", p. 77

³⁶ Dao De Jing, Ch. 57

³⁷ Classic Chinese: 德, Modern Chinese: 德, Pinyin: Dé

a moral value, as is commonly taken in the west, but rather as the original meaning of the word, meaning that which posses the power or strength to accomplish something.

Therefore, when something obeys its nature, it's only following what it has the faculty, power or strength to spontaneously or effortlessly become. It is because of that reason that the real virtue, and therefore the being who follows what is Natural to that being, always seem to be doing nothing at all -or, to say it more accurately, not to be doing anything artificial, forced or unnatural-, and therefore practicing the perfect Wu Wei:

The man of superior virtue is not conscious of his virtue, and in this way he really posses virtue. The man of inferior virtue never looses sight of his virtue, and in this way he looses his virtue.³⁸

And further ahead:

What is more perfect seems to be incomplete; but its utility is unimpaired. What is full seems to be empty; but its usefulness is inexhaustible. What is most straight seems to be crooked. The greatest skill seems to be clumsy. The greatest eloquence seems to stutter.³⁹

The "reward", for lack of a better term, for the person who posses the perfect virtue -or, to say it more accurately, who allows its virtue to manifest itself-, and therefore

³⁸ Dao De Jing, Ch. 38, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p. 158

³⁹ Dao De Jing, Ch. 45, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p. 161

practices the Wu Wei, is that, in being in accordance with the whole Universe -with the greater, unnamable Dao- he cannot suffer any harm.

So the Dao De Jing reads:

He who possesses virtue in abundance may be compared to an infant. Poisonous insects will not sting him. Fierce beasts will not seize him. Birds of prey will not strike him. His bones are weak, his sinews tender, but his grasp is firm [...] He may cry all day without becoming hoarse.⁴⁰

And Zhuang Zi also states:

When a man has perfect virtue, fire cannot burn him, water cannot drown him, heat and cold cannot afflict him, birds and beasts cannot injure him.⁴¹

Of course, it would be very naïve and not-academic to think that the Sage acquires some kind of supernatural powers that would protect him from all harm. Rather, what Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi are trying to express is that the Sage, being fully aware of the Virtue within himself, is also fully aware of his Nature, and thus is able to regard all things equally and flow practicing a perfect Wu Wei. Indeed, continuing with the previous quote, Zhuang Zi says:

I do not say that he makes light of these things. I mean that he distinguishes between safety and danger, contents himself with fortune or misfortune, and is cautious in his comings and goings. Therefore nothing can harm him.⁴²

⁴⁰ Dao De Jing, Ch. 55, in Wing.Tsit Chan, p. 165

⁴¹ Zhuang Zi, Ch. 17, in Burton Watson p. 182

⁴² Zhuang Zi, Ch. 17, in Burton Watson p. 182

The final task that pertains to the present analysis is, then, to try to define what can be considered "natural" for human beings.

Regarding this point, Zhuang Zi states that certain things are common and similar for any human beings -what we would call "basic needs":

*"The people have their constant inborn nature. To weave for their clothing, to till for their food - this is the Virtue they share."*⁴³

However, with that common ground covered, Zhuang Zi also recognizes that all the beings -and human beings are just a part of the other ten thousand beings- have indeed a different nature, and therefore their natural needs and abilities are not the same. Zhuang Zi gives many examples in Chapter One ("Free and Easy Wandering") of the book wearing his name, for example: the requirements for the enormous Peng to fly are completely different than the ones the little dove or the cicada have; a boat needs huge amounts of water to sail, but small bits of trash can sail like boats if a cup of water is spilled; the morning mushroom will never see the night, but there's a caterpillar "that counts five hundred years as one spring"; and so on.

⁴³ Zhuang Zi Ch. 9, in Burton Watson p. 105

The idea behind this, as Fung Yu-lan states, is that "what they share in common is that they are all equally happy when they have a full and free exercise of their natural ability"⁴⁴. Thus, what Zhuang Zi is really trying to say is that there's no real absolute uniformity in the nature of things, and there's not real need for such uniformity:

*"The duck's legs are short, but to stretch them out would worry him; the crane's legs are long, but to cut them down would make him sad. What is long by nature needs no cutting off; what is short of nature needs no stretching."*⁴⁵

However, to achieve such "relative happiness", as Fung Yu-lan calls it, is not as "desirable", lacking for a better term, than to aim for absolute or perfect happiness.

Absolute happiness is the kind of quality that the true sage, the perfect man, possesses, and is characterized by the fact that such happiness does not depend on anything at all. In fact, in the "Free and Easy Wandering" (Chapter One), Zhuang Zi mentions of a man by the name of Lie Zi who could ride on the wind but that, nonetheless, still depended on something (the wind), and thus his happiness was not absolute.

However, further along the same chapter, Zhuang Zi states, regarding Lie Zi:

⁴⁴ Fung Yu-lan, p. 309

⁴⁵ Zhuang Zi, Ch. 8, in Burton Watson p. 99-100

"If he had only mounted on the truth of Heaven and Earth, ridden the changes of the six breaths, and thus wandered through the boundless, then what would he have had to depend upon?"⁴⁶

What Zhuang Zi seems to be saying is that the way in which the Virtue of the Sage manifests itself is by recognizing the differences in the nature of the ten thousand beings, but not regarding any as better or worse, as more or less desirable, or as happier or sadder. In addition to that, the way to achieve absolute happiness is to clearly see and simply accept the changes that happen inevitably, as shown by the well known response to Hui Zi's recrimination about Zhuang Zi's behavior regarding his wife's death:

"When she first died, do you think I didn't grieve like anyone else? But I looked back to her beginning and the time before she was born. Not only before the time she was born, but before the time she had a body. Not only before the time she had a body, but the time before she had a spirit. In the midst of the jumble of wonder and mystery a change took place and she had a spirit. Another change and she had a body. Another change and she was born. Now there's been another change and she's dead. It's just like the progression of the four seasons, spring, summer, fall, winter. [...] If I were to follow after her bawling and sobbing, it would show that I don't understand anything about fate. So I stopped."⁴⁷

So, it seems correct to state that an outcome of the study and practice of the daoist principles is to allow the

⁴⁶ Zhuang Zi, Ch. 1, in Burton Watson p. 32

⁴⁷ Zhuang Zi, Ch. 18, in Burton Watson p. 192

manifestation of a state of fundamental peace and tranquility -what Zhuang Zi calls the "Perfect Happiness" in Chapter 18 of the book bearing his name-, where the differences between things are only noted, and where the changes of life are acknowledged, but one remains in peace and undisturbed.

The next task, then, will be to find out what can be done with the NLP technology in order to facilitate and recreate that tangible part of Daoism as a mean of "paving the way" for the Ultimate experience of the Dao to arrive by itself.

Chapter 2: NLP Basics

Section A: Origins and Definition

The goal of trying to define what is NLP is a difficult one, for a start, because there's no official definition of what NLP is -"official" in the sense that the creators of it, Richard Bandler and John Grinder, never gave a fixed definition, even until our days-, so a way to understand what is covered in the field that bears the label of "Neurolinguistic Programming" is to look at its origins.

In the early years of the 1970 decade (around the year of 1972 to be more precise), Richard Bandler and John Grinder (two academics from the University of California in Santa Cruz) began working together in the task of analyzing three pioneers psychiatrists (Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir and Milton Erickson). They didn't want to create yet another school of therapy or a new theory on why does X or Y illness occur, but rather to find and identify the common trends and patterns used in practice by the best psychiatrists, in order to be able to codify them in an understandable way, and to be able to teach them afterwards to any other professional interested in duplicating the almost magical effects that the other professionals were attaining.

Richard Bandler was a former student of System Engineering, who changed his academic efforts to the study of Psychology and Psychotherapy when he learnt, in that time, that the human brain was being studied by computer technicians in order to find the way in which the neural nets operate, and then try to duplicate their structure and functioning in an artificial processor.

Bandler first started studying recorded sessions of both Fritz Perls (creator of the Psychotherapy known as Gestalt, which basically states that a psychological phenomenon cannot be isolated and treated as an independent issue because it forms a complex and interrelated whole with the entire person's psychological compound) and Virginia Satir (who specialized in Family Therapy), and then started visiting both professionals to witness their therapy sessions live.

What Bandler found was that, even though the approaches, ranges of interest and concrete actions of both professionals were entirely different, there were some common patterns that he could indeed recognize running through both their language and behavior. So, in order to understand better what he was beginning to identify, he turned to look for the help of Richard Grinder, a professor at the same university Bandler was attending.

Grinder was a teacher of Linguistics devoted to the study of Syntax: the way in which sentences are organized. The idea that fascinated Grinder was that, even though "the number of verbal descriptions of human experience is limitless, [...] the number of forms (syntax) in which this infinite set of meanings is represented is highly restricted -has structure- and, therefore, may be described by a set of rules"⁴⁸. That is to say that, while the number of sentences that could potentially be produced in any language is infinite, the number of ways in which those sentences can be produced is very restricted, and therefore it must be governed by a set of fixed and predictable rules.

When they joined their efforts together they confirmed what Bandler had suspected from the very beginning: while Perls and Satir had very different styles, interests and personalities, the fundamental way in which they used language was strikingly similar. Therefore, Bandler and Grinder identified those common language patterns, purged them, and built an elegant model that effectively explained why Perls and Satir were attaining their surprising results with subjects that other professionals have dismissed as untreatable.

⁴⁸ Bandler and Grinder, "The Structure of Magic I", p. 1

Later they started analyzing the work of Milton Erickson - another psychiatrist and hypnotist who were quickly gaining a name for himself among the academic community for the efficacy of his techniques applied to cases that other professionals regarded as beyond redemption- and they came out with a similar conclusion: he too had a set of fixed and predictable language patterns that he was using repeatedly, whether consciously aware of it or not, although his patterns were a little bit different from the kind of patterns used by Perls and Satir.

The findings of their work were published in a series of four books published between the years of 1975 and 1977: "The Structure of Magic I" and "The Structure of Magic II" (consisting of what they called the "Meta Model": the way in which Perls and Satir used language and words to clearly define and specify a problem) and "Patterns of the Hypnotic Techniques of Milton Erickson I" and "Patterns of the Hypnotic Techniques of Milton Erickson II" (consisting of what they called the "Milton Model" or "Reverse Meta Model", because they realized Erickson was using the language in an artfully vague way, different from the specific contents of the Meta Model, in order to generate new options of behavior for his clients).

However, it was not until the year of 1976 that, while gathered at their workplace in Santa Cruz, they realized the necessity to coin a term that could be used to describe all their findings as a group. Therefore, they came out with the idea of naming their newly created science as "Neurolinguistic Programming" -a complicated term that gathers 3 simpler ideas.

First, the term "neuro" refers to the fact that every observable behavior derives from the neurological processes related to the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell). That is to say, the behaviors we externalize are the product, the result, of the information gathered by the five senses, and later interpreted by the brain.

Under that perspective, the human neurology covers, not only the invisible thought processes and the measurable chemical and physiological reactions, but also the correlation of both: the way we interpret the information we gather (the thoughts we have) can affect the tangible chemistry of our brain and bodies, in just the same way that an imbalance of the biological components of the body can result in mood and behavior shifts as well. Both components cannot be truly and profoundly studied if their correlation is not taken into

account, for one can be affected by the other, and vice versa.

Second, the term "linguistic" refers to the fact that human beings use different ways to encode their experience of the world, their findings and lessons learned. For example, a person can paint a picture resembling a certain moment of his life, or create a music piece that reminds him of a certain mood. However, the tool per excellence that human beings share as a way of coding the information they want to preserve and share is language.

Indeed, so critical is the importance of this coding mechanism that it can be used to "more effectively" describe and share the experience a person has of any of the five senses. That is to say, while a person can paint a picture of an epic battle, and a musician can compose a music piece that could at some extent recreate the feelings associated to that battle, the most effective tool for both describing the battle (creating mental images) and the feelings associated to it, is the use of a cultivated and elegant language.

Another advantage of language over the other representational systems is that, while it's impossible to translate the contents of one system into the contents of another, language

is an effective tool to describe, or at least give some insight, on any of the other five representational systems. In other words, while it's impossible to use smells to effectively describe a picture, it's very possible to use language to describe images and smells, as well as sounds, textures and tastes. In fact, that's exactly what happens when we read any good book.

Last, the term "programming" is an analogy that surely derives from Bandler's early days as a System Engineer student. In computer sciences, a program is a set of components or inputs that predictably result in a known outcome when executed in a certain way.

In the same manner, the brain has certain "inputs" (the information gathered by the five senses) that derive in certain "outcomes" (the observable behaviors of the people). The way in which a person organizes his ideas and subjective experiences constitutes a sort of mental "program" that will always result in the same outcomes, provided the same inputs are given under equal conditions and run in the same way.

Gathering all the previous data, a tentatively more understandable definition of NLP was given in 1990 by two of the main figures in the field, Joseph O'Connor and John Seymour:

"NLP deals with the structure of subjective human experience: how we organize what we see, hear and feel, as well as how we filter the exterior world through our senses. It also explores how that external world can be described through language, and how we react, both intentionally as well as unintentionally, in order to produce results"⁴⁹.

Another way to look at it is to see NLP as "the science and art of personal excellence"⁵⁰.

It is a science because there's a method and a process for both defining and applying the methods used by outstanding subjects to obtain outstanding results in certain areas.

It is an art because every good practitioner takes those common and fixed techniques and goes one step further by adding his or her personal style and signature to them, and that subjective component is something that cannot be accurately described in text books -it must be experienced.

In other words, NLP is a process that can be used to discover the patterns used to excel in a given field, as well a tool for duplicating the effective ways of thinking and communicating used by the people who excelled in those fields.

Given the fact that NLP is indeed a science, it must operate under the guide of a certain set of rules or principles. However, since it also deals basically with the subjective

⁴⁹ O'Connor & Seymour, "Introducción a la PNL", p. 30

⁵⁰ O'Connor & Seymour, "Introducción a la PNL", p. 28

human experience (as opposed to other more traditional sciences who deal with "the objective"), it is only logical to suppose that, for it to function properly, a set of basic guidelines different from the ones used by the other sciences must be observed.

This is indeed the case, and those rules -commonly known in NLP as "Behavioral Frames" or "Basic Presuppositions"- will be the object of analysis of the next section.

Section B: Behavioral Frames

First hand it is necessary to define what we mean when we use the word "frame".

For NLP, a frame is the specific context in which anything (a word, an image, a behavior, etc.) is located. For example, if a person hears the word "fire", the meaning of the word can vary drastically depending on the frame in which that word is understood. If the person, on hearing the word "fire", remembers of a barbecue with his family and friends, the meaning of the word is going to be perceived as a positive one. However, if another person remembers of a time when he burnt himself, or of the time when he witnessed the burning down of a house, the word is going to mean something entirely different for that person.

Therefore, when we refer to a "behavioral frame" in NLP, what we're trying to describe is the way in which an NLP practitioner views things or, putting more accurately, the context in which an NLP practitioner allocates the behaviors he sees.

The reason why this very important part of this science is also referred as "basic presuppositions" is because those frames can also be understood as the necessary conditions that must exist for the whole corpus of knowledge of NLP to be true.

Yet another way to put it is that "behavioral frames" or "basic presuppositions" are the characteristics or attitudes that any NLP practitioner must possess in order to effectively understand, apply and generate NLP technology.

Lastly, as O'Connor and Seymour very concisely state, a way of understanding those behavioral frames is simply by thinking of NLP as "an attitude of mind and a way of being in the world."⁵¹

With those definitions in mind, it must be said that the number of behavioral frames in which NLP is based cannot be fixedly stated, mainly because of the reason that NLP is still a developing science, and as long as new technologies are outlined and new applications for those technologies are discovered, new presuppositions will also have to be taken into consideration.

However, no matter how true the previous statement is, it is also true that a certain amount of those behavioral frames are common to all the branches and applications of NLP, in a very similar way that, no matter how sharp the distinctions between the different branches of Buddhism are, each and every Buddhist in the world should agree at least with some

⁵¹ O'Connor & Seymour, "Introducción a la PNL", p. 22

basic and common principles (for example, the "Four Noble Truths").

Thus, what we'll be analyzing in the remaining part of this section are those common behavioral frames that are relevant to the present paper.

Objectives vs. Problems⁵²

One of the very first tendencies that Bandler noticed when he started learning Psychology was that the different academics, in their efforts to help people, were focusing more in what was going wrong and what problems a person had, rather than in the goal of attaining a person's well being. The underlying principle behind this was, understandably, that an insight on the nature and origin of the problem could lead to a solution of it. The problem with this approach is that to enquire about the causes, the extents or the responsible subjects of a certain condition, only leaves the subject feeling worse off than at the beginning of the questioning, and it rarely leads by itself to a description of a practical solution for the problem.

⁵² All the Behavioral Frames described in this section are enumerated in Sevilla, "Manual del Curso de Practitioner en Programación Neurolingüística e Hipnosis Clínica", p. 4; the descriptions of each Behavioral Frame come from personal class notes of the author of the present paper

NLP, however, sees things differently. As Bandler says: "I did not look for 'what went wrong' or the 'whys'; I did not look for cures; I looked at what worked, no matter how"⁵³. In other words, for NLP it's not important if something is "right" or "wrong" because "right" and "wrong" will depend greatly on the context in which those observations are made, as we stated previously on the example using the word "fire".

If there's one thing that NLP distinguishes is between what is "effective" and what is "ineffective" in the purpose of attaining a goal (even if that "something" is to cause him or herself troubles). So, for example, while traditional therapy sees a phobia as a problem to be cured, NLP sees it, in one hand, as a very effective way of attaining a certain state of mind (fear), and also as a unique opportunity to study what is known as a "one time learning": a lesson or a reaction learnt in the very first and only attempt.

From this perspective, wouldn't it be great to discover how such mechanism works in order to duplicate this process and its result, for example, when teaching how to drive a car? The answer should obviously be an emphatic "yes".

⁵³ Bandler, "Get the Life You Want", p. xix

Some of the other behavioral frames that we'll be analyzing further ahead are developments of this initial presupposition.

How? vs. Why?

NLP focuses more on how something comes to happen rather than why it happens. The reason for this is that, while the "why-focus" tends to find excuses and justifications for a given situation, the "how-focus" will lead to understand the structure of a problem.

The disadvantage of the latter approach is that to know the underlying principles of a situation does not necessarily produce a desirable change by itself, while the latter way of viewing things will lead us to gain a valuable insight on how to reinforce and replicate a state, if it's a desirable one, or to stop "the habit of feeling bad"⁵⁴ when there's no need to feel that way.

For example, a person with arachnophobia (a morbid and incapacitating fear of spiders) may know that it started exactly at age 7, 10 months and 8 days because a spider landed on the person's face and was left unattended by his or

⁵⁴ Bandler, "Get the Life You Want", p. xxiii

her parents for 10 minutes, but all those facts don't say a thing about how to stop the panic attacks from happening.

However, if we know that the fear is the results of a mental process, and if we also discover *how* that process runs, we may do something to interrupt it on time before the panic strikes. A typical example of such process can be something along the lines of:

The person sees the spider in the outside world => The person makes an augmented mental image of it => The person zooms in on an specific details, like the hairy legs => the person starts to remember how does it feel to have a spider's hairy legs over himself => the person hears himself in his head, screaming from fear => the panic attack starts to take place and is expressed externally by the person.

Therefore, if an NLP practitioner manages to teach the person how that process works, and therefore how to interrupt that process, then the panic attack simply cannot take place.

Feedback vs. Failure

Since NLP deals greatly with the human subjective experience, it's not surprising that a "failure" is only regarded as such depending on a person's way of viewing things. That is to say, a failure can be viewed as either a loose or an

opportunity for improvement depending on the context and the person's attitude towards his or her life experience.

For example, a duck's short legs can be viewed as a nature's failure only if we think all animals should be able to run as fast as a deer with its long legs. However, the duck's legs are the greatest success if we regard the capacity of that animal for propelling itself over water.

From a more human perspective, the main reason why NLP avoids the usage of the term "failure" is the mental state it produces. When facing a difficult or adverse life situation, or any other unwanted result a person obtains, the use of the word "failure" puts the person in a dead-end street: that person tried something, he or she did not achieved success, and therefore his or her efforts have been futile which, in turn, usually leave the person feeling emptier and worse off than at the beginning.

However, if the person sees that unwanted result only as an opportunity to correct what he or she did wrong, the panorama changes completely: the person is no longer facing a dead end street, but rather a whole new world of opportunities open before his or her eyes. If all happenings in life are viewed as mere results, then any "failure" turns out to be an

opportunity to learn something more valuable, an opportunity to correct our course of action, and it allows the person to keep the initial objective in sight so that he or she can pursue it in even more effective ways.

The only person capable of operating his own mind is that person himself, and is therefore responsible for his results

Together with the previous frame, what this presupposition does is to place the responsibility of a person's mood and states of mind straight into that person's lap.

If no one else in the whole world can get into a person's head and think his thoughts, then the only being responsible for seeing things as failures, successes or simply results, is the person himself.

Law of Requisite Variety

Derived from a law from cybernetics that states that "the variable with the most flexibility is the variable that controls the system", what this basic presupposition states is that the person with the most options available to him or herself (in other words, the person with the most flexible way of thinking and acting) is the person that will have more chances of attaining his or her goals.

Since this is a law derived from mathematics, the best way to understand it is with an example from mathematics.

Given the basic function: "A + B + C = X", the variables A, B and C don't vary in the same way. The variable "A" can only be a number between 1 and 5; the variable "B" can only be a decimal number between 0 and 1; and the variable "C" can be any number between -10 and 10.

As we can conclude after making a quick analysis of that function, since the variables "A" and "B" are much more limited than the variable "C", we can say with enough security that the final result "X" will depend mainly on the value of "C", which can lead to the conclusion that variable "C", having the widest possible range of variation, is the one that controls the system or equation.

Translating that example to the sphere of human behavior, what NLP states is that, given the fact that any number of human beings are after the same goal, the one that is more likely to attain it will be the person who's able to think and act in the greatest variety of ways. So, if a person's goal is to "attain happiness", for example, but he can only see a divorce as something bad, then that person will be less likely to attain his or her goal than a person who, having the same desired outcome in mind, can view the same divorce as something bad, neutral or even good.

The meaning of a communication is the response it provokes

Based on one of the basic principles of Social Communication, what this behavioral frame states, simply put, is that the words a person says (or the actions that person undertakes) mean what the person intended them to mean only as long as they remain within the person's head (or are not expressed outwardly, respectively).

This attitude (very properly expressed in English expressions such as "think outside of the box" or "get out of your own head") prevents the person, together with the Law of Requisite Variety analyzed previously, from developing a "mental rigor mortis" in which he or she regards any opinion, attitude or behavior different from his own as wrong or mistaken.

Albert Einstein used to say that "smart people learn from their mistakes; wise people learn from other people's mistakes" and what this presupposition does is exactly that: it allows us to step outside of our own shoes and to step inside another person's position and experience in order to gain a newer and more complete perspective of life.

Every behavior has a positive intention that motivates it

Simply put, what this basic presupposition states is the fact that any human behavior that we can get in contact with or think of, no matter how bizarre, crazy or weird it may seem, is the way that a person has to fulfill a good intention he has, whether that person is consciously aware of it or not.

The classic example given in psychology for this behavioral frame is eating disorders: an anorexic woman is starving herself to death because she has the need to feel loved by her close relatives. In this case, to die of hunger may be a less-than-positive outcome or behavior, but the intention of being noted and loved by that woman's close relatives remains a positive one nonetheless.

Every behavior is valid in a certain context

Very related to the previous presupposition analyzed, this statement calls the attention on the fact that even the most extreme or otherwise unjustifiable actions (for example, to kill a human being) can be valid in certain contexts (for example, in self defense).

The current observable behavior is the best option available

Starting from the evolutionist premise that human behavior, like any other component of human experience and existence, is designed to adapt itself to the circumstances, and taking

into account the last two frames analyzed, what NLP argues is that, even when facing a behavior that may seem self destructive, in reality that was the best option (or, in some cases, the only option) the person had.

For example, in the case of a person with arachnophobia, the panic attack may not seem a very rational or "evolved" response to a spider, but the truth is that the person just can't react in any other way. Or, to give another example, any human being have the need to feel loved, but unfortunately some of them try to fulfill that need by calling attention on themselves by means of hurting themselves in a way or another. Obviously, if any of those people would know of a better way to fulfill their respective needs (a less painful, more efficient way, etc.), they would opt for it.

As it was stated at the beginning of the present chapter, the range of action and application of NLP is very wide, and it's still increasing and developing fast year after year. Therefore, it is necessary to focus in a more specific point in order to be able to derive some useful conclusions using all the information from the first chapter to the end of this one.

Therefore, in the next section the focus will concentrate on the analysis in one area where NLP can be used -namely, psychotherapy-, and even more specifically in one tool widely used to help people attain a healthier attitude towards life: a tool commonly known among the NLP community as "Reframing".

Section C: Reframing

As it was stated in the previous section, a "frame" in NLP is that specific context which gives sense and meaning to something, whether it is a word, an action, a picture or any other thing you can think of.

In other words, from an NLP point of view, seldom -if any- events have a fixed meaning, but rather the meaning of that event depends upon the frame in which we perceive or put it.

Reframing, then, from the NLP perspective, is that tool which allows us to change the meaning of something in order to create more and better options as well as a better attitude and way of living for a person.

When a person engages in a certain behavior -for example, depression- when facing a certain event -for example, being fired from his job-, that's because the event is seen in a certain frame or context -for example, that to get fired is bad because there won't be a paycheck next month.

However, if a person somehow changes the frame in which the same event is viewed -for example, that to be fired is a great opportunity to improve his salary as well as his working conditions-, the result is that the behavior is also going to be different -for example, he'll be motivated

towards finding a better job instead of depressed for loosing the previous one.

The concept was first clearly defined and named in 1979 by Bandler and Grinder in his book "Frogs into Princes".

Some of the early definitions given at the time included that reframing was "a specific way of contacting the portion or part -for lack of a better word- of the person that is causing a certain behavior to occur, or that is preventing a certain behavior from occurring"⁵⁵.

Another way to look at it is to say that reframing is a tool that allows making a distinction between the intention of a behavior, and the behavior itself, therefore helping us to recover the idea behind the behavioral frame that "the meaning of our communication is the response we get": people often don't realize the difference between what they intend to communicate and what they communicate.

Later, in 1981, another more radical definition was given, by the lines of: "Reframing takes one symptom and turns it into another"⁵⁶, along the premise that "when a symptom becomes a teacher for you, it becomes an ally, because there is nothing in the world that can't be used in some way"⁵⁷.

⁵⁵ Bandler & Grinder, "Frogs Into Princes", p. 138

⁵⁶ Bandler & Grinder, "Trance-Formations", p. 142

⁵⁷ Bandler & Grinder, "Trance-Formations", p. 145

Finally, in 1982, the book "Reframing" was published, dealing with the topic of reframing entirely, and also going into details and specifications to further clarify the definitions given before, which is something that will be undertaken now. First, the two main ways in which reframe can operate will be explained (namely: "Meaning Reframing" and "Context Reframing"), and then the definitions given before in this section will be further clarified along with some additional examples and cases.

The main idea behind reframing, as stated before, is that events -actions, behaviors, words, and so on- don't have a meaning in and on themselves. That's a useful simplification, but for the sake of clarity some specifications and further examples must be given.

When a person takes an event, a stimulus, and acts upon a judgment that the person makes of that stimulus, what is really happening is that the person is making an implicit statement about the way in which that person views that stimuli or that event. In other words, if a person reacts in a positive way every time that person faces X stimulus, what that person is really saying is: "In my way of experiencing the world, X is perceived as something good, and therefore I

react in a positive way". The converse is also true: if a stimulus Y is seen as bad, the person's response will be a negative one.

However, there was a behavioral frame in the previous section that stated that "every behavior has a positive intention that motivates it", so even when a person externalizes a "negative behavior", product of a negative judgment that the person makes of something, it is to be understood as a less-than-positive way of achieving a goal or a motivation that remains positive and well-intentioned nonetheless.

Therefore, one more detailed type of reframing is what Bandler and Grinder called "Meaning Reframing": the type of reframing in which the event in the external world doesn't actually change, but the meaning of the event is changed to something different. An example given by Bandler and Grinder will help to further clarify the concept:

"Leslie-Cameron Bandler was working with a woman who had a compulsive behavior -she was a clean freak! The rest of her family could function pretty well with everything the mother did except for her attempts to care for the carpet [...] When this particular woman looked down at the carpet [...] she would rush off to get the vacuum cleaner and vacuum the carpet immediately [...] three to seven times a day [...] At home everybody referred to the mother as being a nag, because she nagged them about this, and nagged them about that. Her nagging centered mainly on the carpet."⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Bandler & Grinder, "Reframing", p. 6

That's a case where there's a clear negative behavior (the compulsive cleaning and nagging of the mother) caused by a negative evaluation of a stimuli that, for other people, was not necessarily bad: the mother regarded a carpet with messy hair -not even dirty, but only with messy hair- as a undeniable proof of her incompetence as a housewife, and therefore of her low value as a person, and therefore she acted on it immediately. The way in which the NLP practitioner "meaning-reframed" the woman's problem is very elegant, to say the least:

"I want you to close your eyes and see your carpet, and see that there's not a single footprint on it anywhere. It's clean and fluffy -not a mark anywhere [...] and realize fully that that means you are totally alone, and that the people you care for and love are nowhere around!"⁵⁹

So, in this case, the meaning of the stimuli that generated a negative response for the mother (messy carpet = bad person = feel bad = compulsive cleaner and nagger) was given a new meaning that allowed everybody in the family to be happier (messy carpet = your loved ones are around = feel good = no compulsive behavior or nagging).

This is a classic example where it is demonstrated that the stimulus for a problem behavior doesn't really need to change -that's there's nothing inherently bad about it.

⁵⁹ Bandler & Grinder, "Reframing", p. 6

The preceding example is also congruent with the other behavioral frame that stated that "the only person capable of operating his own mind is that person himself, and is therefore responsible for his results". In the previous example, the woman already tried to solve her problem (the bad feeling she had every time the carpet was messy or dirty) by getting other people to do things (not walking on the carpet, going into the house through the back door, etc.), but the only time when the problem reached a healthier solution was when the woman took care of her own mind and changed what didn't worked.

Of course, another possible solution would be to just have the other members of the family to assume responsibility of their own minds and attitudes and therefore to just regard the mother's nagging as irrelevant, but that's not the best possible solution because one member of the family would still feel unhappy when the carpet would be stained, no matter that the other members of the family didn't care about her unhappiness.

However, useful as it may be, the previous case is just one possible way to see reframing. In the next case, what Bandler and Grinder called "Context Reframing": a reframing

in which the event in the external world doesn't change either, but it is located in a new context where it is regarded as acceptable.

This type of reframing is based on the behavioral frame that stated that "every behavior is valid in a certain context", and will be further explained, as it was done previously, by analyzing an example:

"Virginia was working with a family. The father was a banker who was professionally stuffy. He must have had a degree in it. He wasn't a bad guy; he was very well intentioned. He took good care of his family [...] The daughter acted like her father [...] The father's repeated complaint in the session was that the mother hadn't done a very good job of raising the daughter, because the daughter was so stubborn".⁶⁰

Up to this point, the problem is clearly defined: the father complains that the daughter is stubborn and rebellious, but refuses to see that he himself is stubborn in a way. The following is the part of the session where the daughter's behavior was context-reframed, leaving her behavior untouched, but placing it in a context where it's not only acceptable, but desirable:

"Now I want you to turn and look at your daughter, and to realize beyond a doubt that you've taught her how to be stubborn and how to stand up for herself, and that that is something priceless. That gift that you've given to her is something that can't be bought, and it's something that may save her life. Imagine how valuable that will be when your daughter

⁶⁰ Bandler & Grinder, "Reframing", p. 8

goes out on a date with a man who has bad intentions".⁶¹

What Virginia Satir does is to give the father a new context in which that stubbornness that the daughter doubtlessly learnt from him would not be a bad thing at all, and would even be a good thing. In this way, one behavior -to be stubborn- is left intact, but changes drastically from a family problem to a invaluable inheritance from the father to the daughter, just by the means of placing that behavior in a different context.

Now, given those two main ways in which reframing can operate, it is possible to go back to the previous given definitions of reframing for further analysis and a wider range of situations where reframing can be applied.

The first obvious additional application for reframing is in personal therapy, given the first definition that reframing is "a specific way of contacting the portion or part -for lack of a better word- of the person that is causing a certain behavior to occur, or that is preventing a certain behavior from occurring".

⁶¹ Bandler & Grinder, "Reframing", p. 9

In the first two examples given previously in this section, reframing was used to solve problematic family situations. However, a person is, at some extent, like a "family" within a simple body. What NLP tries to say by the previous statement is that, whenever a person has two or more conflicting needs, wants or wishes, the dynamic can be viewed as the person having multiple "parts", or multiple "personas" within himself, and that those parts are not in accord, therefore causing an uneasy situation for the person.

Once the conflicting parts are identified, treatment will revolve around the idea of finding alternative ways of "making everyone happy"; that is to say, according to the behavioral frame that "the current observable behavior is the best option available", the role of the NLP practitioner will be that of helping the person to find a way to fulfill, in the best possible way, the needs the person has as a complex human being.

Another way to put it is the second definition that was given at the beginning of this section: "Reframing is a tool that allows making a distinction between the intention of a behavior, and the behavior itself", and that will be better explained by an example:

"A woman wanted to lose 45 pounds. She had lost this weight in the past, but every time she lost it,

she regained it. She could get it off, but she couldn't keep it off. We discovered through reframing that [...] the part of her that caused her to overeat was doing that in order to protect her marriage [...] In the opinion of this part of the woman, if she were to lose weight, she would be physically attractive to men [...] she would be approached and propositioned. In the opinion of this part she did not have adequate resources to make good decisions for herself in response to those propositions".⁶²

So, basically, what was presented in the previous example can be viewed as a situation that can be dealt with via meaning reframing: one subconscious part of the woman wishes to maintain her marriage and does so by overeating. The goal of the NLP practitioner, then, would be to help the person's subconscious realize that, as good as the intention may be, there may be healthier ways to achieve that same goal, and that would definitely not include overeating. This is also coherent with the behavioral frame that states that "every behavior has a positive intention that motivates it".

Finally, the last way to view and understand reframing stated that "reframing takes one symptom and turns it into another" because "when a symptom becomes a teacher for you, it becomes an ally, because there is nothing in the world that can't be used in some way".

⁶² Bandler & Grinder, "Frogs Into Princes", p. 138

The case study to better clarify this point is too long to be quoted, so a brief summary will be given: a woman suffers from feet numbness, which makes it impossible for her to maintain balance, and therefore to walk without help. After dealing with the problem via context reframing, the NLP practitioner achieves the goal of changing the numbness from happening all the time, to only happening when the subconscious of the person (responsible of the psychological numbness) was willing to give the woman a very concise message: to speak out her needs, and to fight for her right to be pleased by her husband. In other words, the numbness was changed from happening always, to happening only when she was allowing other people "step on her head" and disrespect her needs. In this way, her previous disability became a tool for herself and for her well being.

Finally, one last case example must be given in order to deal with an extreme case -people with suicidal tendencies-, which will be useful for further analysis in chapter three.

According to NLP, suicidal tendencies -just like any other human behavior- is the result of a mental process, and therefore, if we manage to discover how that process runs rather than why the person is thinking about suicide, then it would be possible to stop it from happening.

As we stated before, the way to prevent an unwanted behavior from occurring is to "short circuit" the mental process that derives in the behavior being exteriorized, and that is called, in NLP argot, a "patter interrupt". However, there's one interesting detail about suicidal tendencies that makes it a little bit different than the other, less radical cases that we may encounter in NLP literature.

The concise element that makes this extreme case different than the other ones is the way in which the pattern that leads to suicide is interrupted. In other cases, what is generally done is that the NLP practitioner, upon hearing the client's complaints and demands, acts as a sort of "negotiator" or "facilitator" between the person's conflicting inner parts. The approach is rather a gentle and delicate intervention with the intention of leading the person in a direction different from the direction that's generating the conflict.

For example, if the conflict arises because the person sees the task of writing his taxes declaration as an unpleasant thing to do, then the role of the NLP practitioner is to help the mind of the individual move away from that feeling, and

towards a different way of viewing the previously conflicting stimuli (to write the taxes declaration).

When dealing with a suicidal case, however, a commonly accepted and practiced method is to just go along the direction of the initial conflict, and not only "go along with it", but also to make it stronger. In other words, a typical pattern interrupt for someone who says "I'm thinking of committing suicide" can easily be something along the lines of "That's a wonderful idea! I agree that it's better for you to die than to continue living the way you are..."

Of course, after that initial shock, the idea is to help the client to achieve healthier ways of dealing with his or her everyday problems, but the detail that should be noted is that, in order to deal with a situation that moves the client in a certain direction, instead of trying to convince the person of something different, that same direction is reinforced and encouraged. Studies and follow ups from as long as two years have shown that, when reinforced, such measure tend to move the client's old extreme response in the opposite direction. In other words, it is as if by adding to the problem in an extreme case, the client would automatically reverse to a different intent and behavior.

That is also the case with people with any other severe conditions that satisfy the criteria of dissociation -which is that the person cannot experience both states simultaneously (like being drunk and sober at the same time). Therefore, addictions (anything from alcoholism to heroin dependency), dissociated personality disorders (what is commonly known as "multiple personalities") or manic-depressives, are excellent candidates for a successful treatment via this specific "reinforcing pattern interrupt" method.

Finally, after reviewing some key Daoist principles in Chapter One, and some general key concepts of NLP, as well as some more specific details regarding a specific NLP tool such as Reframing in the present chapter, it's time to move on to the conclusion of the present paper, where some conclusion will be made in order to satisfy the second objective presented at the beginning of the paper -namely: to support the thesis that, since both Daoism and the parts of NLP specifically studied in this paper have so many similar characteristics, the latter can be a very effective tool for experiencing the objective, describable portion of the experience which the Daoist thinkers strive to describe in their texts.

Chapter 3: Conclusions

As it was stated at the beginning of the present paper, the second objective of this dissertation is to "support the thesis that, since both Daoism and the parts of NLP specifically studied in this paper have so many similar characteristics, the latter can be a very effective tool for experiencing the objective, describable portion of the experience which the Daoist thinkers strive to describe in their texts".

Now, two efficient ways way of achieving such goal are the following: in one hand, to analyze and show those elements of both Daoism and NLP where they agree in general; and, in the other hand, to show how those parts support each other in the specifics by analyzing the impact one tool -namely: reframing- can have in human behavior.

Now, beginning the analysis with the concepts studied in Section A of Chapter 1 of the present paper -concerning the topic of Yin Yang- the first thing that was stated was that one detail that makes this philosophy different from other ones is that, for Daoism, the opposites -Yin and Yang- are not necessarily opposite, but rather complimentary. That is to say, people cannot regard night as less desirable than day just as they shouldn't regard happiness as more desirable

than sadness because they all have their own space and time within human experience.

Now, that's almost exactly as to say that, if not even the extremes of a spectrum can be regarded as "better" or "worse", then it is also reasonable to say that any behavior is valid in some context, which is exactly what one of the NLP Behavioral Frames state.

Then, going along the lines of that analysis, Daoism states that Yin and Yang may maintain a relationship of complementation, but also one of exclusion as well -for one cannot exist with the same strength while the other prevails without diminishing. NLP, at the same time, does not automatically denigrate the existence of a "bad" option, because all possible alternatives given a certain situation, as was stated before, are just part of a greater scheme: the whole human potential. As Cooper states:

"It is the same impulse the one that the delinquent uses for committing crimes the one that the well-disposed person uses for helping others: only the motivation and the objectives are different. Love, as well as hate, utilizes the same possibilities and capabilities of the human being".⁶³

Therefore, giving an specific example, the same energy that the person uses for keeping himself depressed is the same energy that the person will utilize for helping himself out

⁶³ Cooper, "Yin y Yang", p. 21

of his depressed state. That change, however, is not possible while the person keeps on focusing that energy on his depression; for the "cure" to happen, the depression-focused energy must be lowered in order to allow the happiness-energy to ascend.

Now, regarding the cases when an extreme -either Yin or Yang- is converted to its opposite after more of the same energy is added, it was clearly shown that, according to NLP, that is a perfectly valid practice.

Indeed, recalling one of the last paragraphs of the previous section, the best cases for working with this kind of approach are indeed extremely problematic cases, like suicidal, manic-depressive and multiple personality people. That was clearly explained there, and therefore would not be reviewed again.

Now, one of the greatest characteristic of the Daoist Sage is that he profoundly and clearly apprehends life under two premises that are very problematic, to say the least, for other average human beings.

The first one, as stated in Section A of Chapter 1, is that the Daoist Sage has come to the understanding that human beings are just another being among the ten thousand beings - that is to say, just another element of the whole creation-

and that, therefore, human beings -and himself as one of those beings- will be affected by the Universal laws (like decay and death) just in the same way as any other beings.

The second way in which a Daoist Sage views life differently, deriving from the previous one, is the fact that all beings are not only equal, but one and the same. Therefore, to harm one being is to harm oneself in a way because the Sage recognized in the other beings those characteristics that he possesses himself.

As it has been stated time and again along the present dissertation, one of the things that drastically differentiate NLP from other schools of therapy is the general notion that every behavior is valid in some context, as well as the specific tool of Reframing which, simply put, allows the person to see things from a different perspective, as exposed in Chapter 2.

Therefore, what NLP in general, and Reframing in specific, does is to help people come to the realization of those two characteristics previously exposed, by the means of constantly helping the individual to "see things differently" and to "place himself inside other people's shoes". That way, one a person has become used to "thinking outside of the box", and has get some practice in seeing things from a

different perspective, that person is in a better position to realize that, in reality, he and any human being are just parts of a greater whole where all beings are subject to the rules of that greater scheme, in one hand, and that therefore all beings are, in a way, one and the same, because you cannot injure a part of a system without making the whole complex suffer as well. It is impossible to damage one kidney without having the whole body suffers in some way as well.

In other words, another way of viewing Reframing is as a tool for achieving that perspective, that point of view where cyclic change is viewed as natural, and therefore naturally accepted, as well as a point of view where things lose their intrinsic "good" or "bad" characteristics, and therefore all behaviors are accepted as good in some context.

That previously described perspective, or point of view, which is in absolute accord with the Daoist Sage's attitude, is called a "Going Meta" in NLP: to subjectively escalate in hierarchical characteristics in order to accept the totality of occurrences as necessary parts of a greater whole.

Regarding Wu Wei, it may be useful to re-view it in the following way: that Wu Wei is that way of acting which is the

result of apprehending things regarding higher principles of the universe, for example the Zi Ran or the Yin Yang. Effectively, as stated in Chapter 1, Wu Wei is the way in which the Sage acts after he has come to a full understanding and internalization of things like what is natural to him and others, what is his De (Virtue) as well as that of other beings, and how do the universal energies of Yin and Yang operate, and the rules that govern them.

Therefore, it is absolutely congruent to say that anything that would lead to accept and internalize those higher principles or universal laws is, at the same time, helping the person to achieve a better "Wu Wei".

Consequently, it is logical to say that anything that leads the person to achieve "Relative Happiness", and later to attain "Absolute Happiness", would be a "very effective tool for [helping the person to] experience the objective, describable states which the Daoist thinkers strive to describe in their texts".

So, since "Relative Happiness" was described earlier as the realization that "there's no real absolute uniformity in the nature of things, and there's not real need for such uniformity", it is congruent to say that NLP would be a useful tool to achieve Relative Happiness because it helps

the person, as was explained previously, to see, understand and accept the "truth" in which other people live. Or, putting it in another way, reframing is an effective tool for helping the person to reach that state in which the absolute heterogeneity of nature can be fully and easily accepted.

Now, since "Absolute Happiness" was described earlier as the kind of happiness that "does not depend on anything at all", derived from the fact of easily and readily accepting the change in life as the most natural and unavoidable thing (as Zhuang Zi described it as mounting "on the truth of Heaven and Earth, ridden the changes of the six breaths, and thus wandered through the boundless"), it is congruent to say that NLP is a useful tool to also achieve Absolute Happiness.

Finally, under no circumstance this dissertation pretends to be an exhaustive one, covering all the therapeutic implications of NLP associated with Daoism. The door is still open for debate concerning many interesting topics like the use of other specific tools like Anchoring or Submodalities, which can in and on itself be the topic for two additional complete dissertations. For now it will suffice to say that the two objectives of this thesis have been sufficiently covered and proven.

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