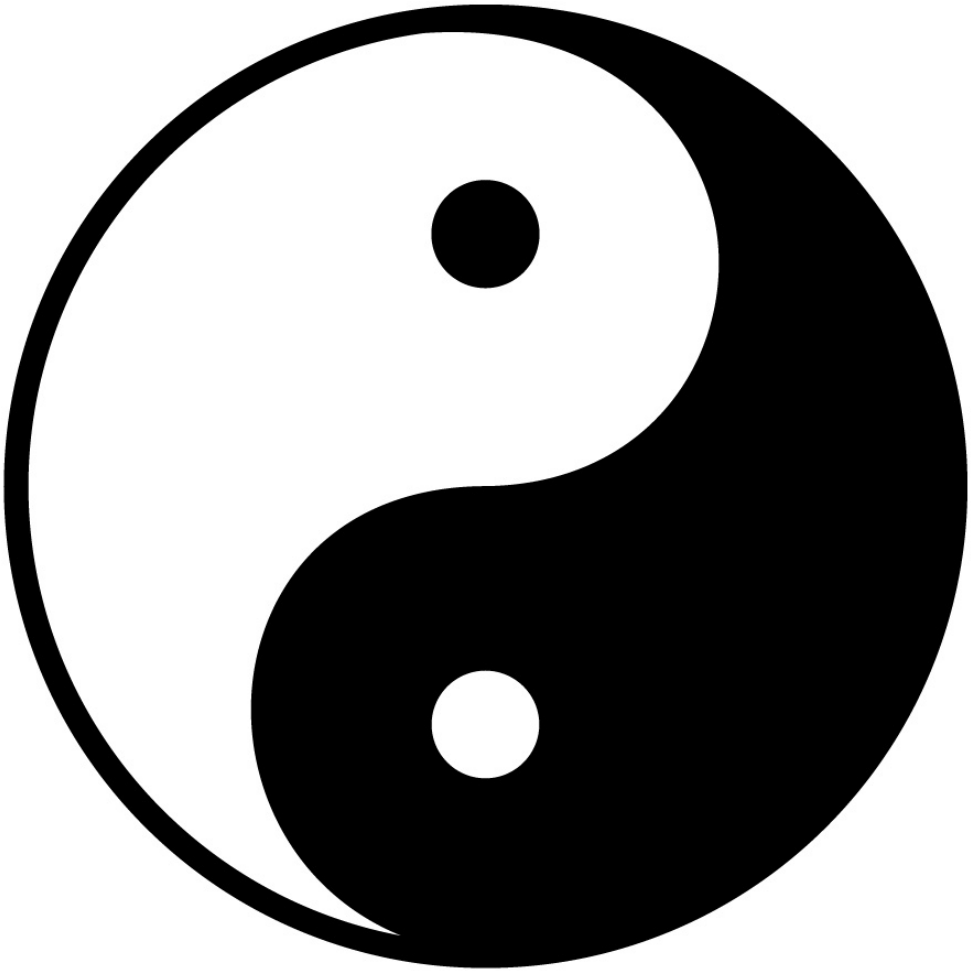
The yin yang symbol – order and chaos



I was watching YouTube the other day – one of Jordan Peterson's talks, Who Dares Say He Believes in God. Afterward, as YouTube does, it led me to a related video showing one of his older university lectures where he talked about the meaning behind the yin yang symbol. It's a symbol I've seen throughout my life but I've never heard it explained with the same depth of meaning.

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“The yin yang symbol is interesting for a variety of reasons, because the Daoists believe that the symbol represents “being.”

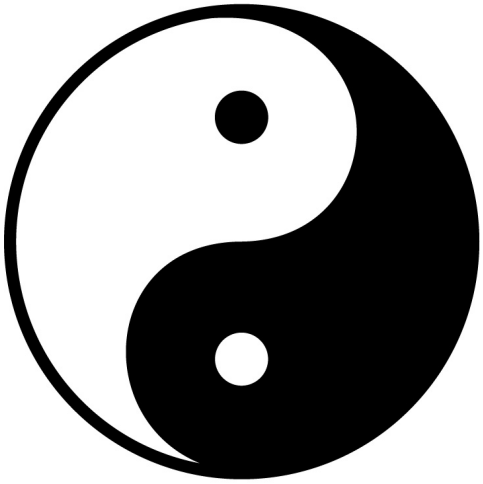
“Now, being is not the same thing as objective reality. Being is what you experience as a conscious creature. *That’s* being. And for the Daoist being is made up of these two elements — order and chaos. The reason for that is quite straightforward — wherever you go, and whenever you live, and whoever you are, each environment that you’re in is composed of things you understand and things that work the way that you expect them to, and things you do not understand and that can pull the rug out from under you at any moment.

“So in some sense these are symbolic representations of the most unchanging elements of being — the most real things.

“A typical person will look at this and think, “Well, those aren’t real.” They *are* real. In fact they’re *hyper* real, because one of the things that defines real is that it’s permanent. And it *is* permanent. No matter where you go there are things you know and things you don’t know, and it doesn’t matter who you are. It’s permanent, so it’s part of the existential landscape of human being.

“Another interesting thing about the yin yang symbol: The black paisley has a little white dot in it and the white paisley has a little black dot in it. The reason for that is the Daoists also recognised that chaos can turn to order at any moment, so a new order can rise out of a chaotic structure. That’s a revolution in some sense. But by the same token, if you’re in a place that’s orderly and predictable something can happen that casts you into a chaotic situation right away. So even though these two things oppose each other in some sense there’s a continual dynamic interplay between them.

Order and chaos constitute the stage

Known		**Unknown**
Yang		Yin
Order		Chaos
Masculinity		Femininity
Day		Night
The known		The unknown
Authoritarianism		Decadence
Fascism		Nihilism

“The final thing that’s interesting about this symbol is a brilliant idea because Dao also means ‘the way’ and the way is the line between the two. That indicates that the optimal position for a human being isn’t in chaos or in order, because if it’s too orderly then it’s totalitarian, and if it’s too chaotic then it’s disgust and fear and emotional pain and depression.

“So where’s the proper place? The Daoist answer is right on the line, where you have one foot in order so that you’re fairly stable, and you have another foot in chaos so that new and interesting and compelling and transforming things are happening to you. Your nervous system basically tells you when you’re there by making you interested in whatever it is that you’re engaged in. The fact that the thing that you’re engaged in grips you, which is really an unconscious process, is because your nervous system, which has adapted to the environment of chaos and order, is telling you that if you’re engaged and interested you are in the place where the balance between chaos and order is perfect.

“Think about that. It’s no use reading a [research] paper that

you can’t understand at all, even if hypothetically it would be a tremendously informative paper, but you can’t understand it because it’s all chaos to you. And then there’s absolutely no reason to read a paper for the tenth time if you’ve already extracted the information from it. It’s going to be boring.

“So what do you want? You want a paper that you can almost understand, [where] the cognitive frameworks that you understand are sufficient for you to take the next steps into the unknown, and the paper will inform you of that. Books do that. Movies do that. Conversations do that. Even lines of thought do that. If they’re at exactly the right level of complexity for you they’re going to engage you.”

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A good story. It’ll stick with me next time the symbol shows up.

Visit www.jordanpeterson.com for his blog, podcast, YouTube channel, recommended books, courses, and more.

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