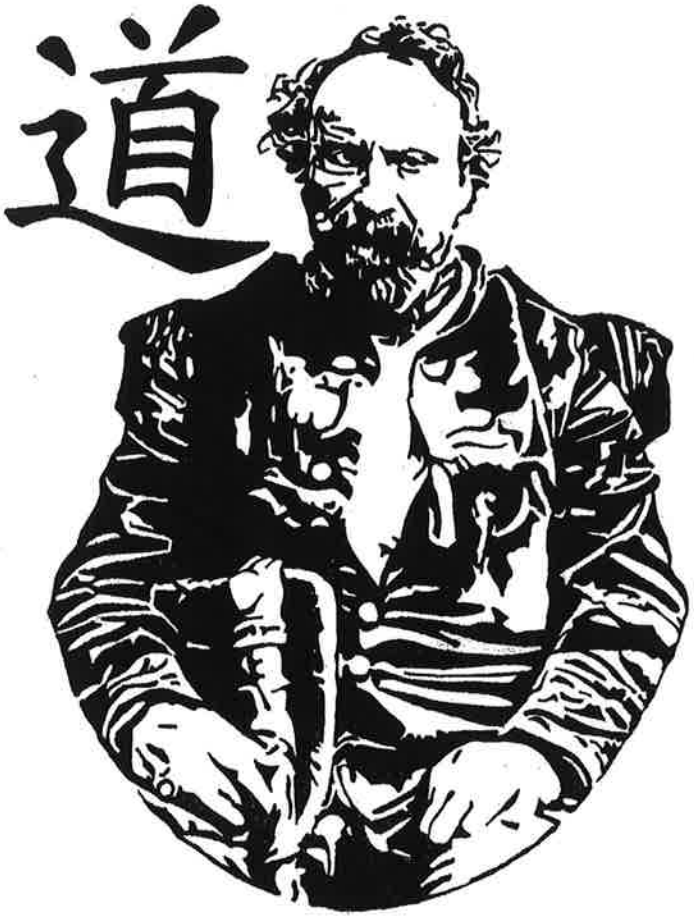
# The Tao of Norton:

## Action and Non-Action in the Reign-Unreign of California's Eccentric Monarch

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0.2. Abstract.

Joshua Abraham Norton (1818-1880), a successful then suddenly ruined business man in Gold Rush-era San Francisco, declared himself "Norton I, Dei gratia Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico," inaugurating a two decades-long "reign" over San Francisco. This popular folk hero, while politically powerless, nevertheless manages to bring about changes in San Francisco merely by suggestion and force of personality. These leadership qualities resemble the philosophical Taoist concepts of wu-wei, accomplishing without doing, and Te, accomplishing by weight of dignity or virtue. In this thesis, we outline ancient Taoist political thought; give biographical highlights of the Emperor's life, along with his far-sighted, prophetic, occasionally amusing newspaper decrees; then take a deep dive into the Taoist political manual, the Tao Te Ching, comparing its precepts to the historical details of Norton's "reign," to ascertain how closely he resembles the Taoist ideal of the "Sage-king." We conclude he does sometimes appear to be a Sage-king in the Taoist mold, but more often hews closer to a Confucian model of enlightened leadership.

0.3. Signature page.

Dean Stephanie L. Sauvé

Dean Mark Brummitt

For my wife, Laura--Τῃ καλλίστῃ

and the late Bill Cassidy--Νηπένθη

With gratitude

0.5. Table of contents.

## 0.6. Introduction.

In San Francisco on a night sometime in the 1860s, a white nativist assembly had broken out into the streets, forming a mob that roamed the lanes up and down, intent on finding a few Chinese laborers to lynch, whom the rioters saw as competitors for their jobs. Having cornered their intended victims in an alley, the mob was startled to find a shabbily dressed gentleman, known to them all, between them and the terrified Chinese immigrants. He simply knelt and began to recite the Lord's Prayer. Shamed, the crowd dispersed, leaving the Chinese laborers unharmed (Martin 98, Moylan par. 46, Carlsson par. 11).

This shabby figure was none other than Emperor Norton, a colorful figure in Gold Rush-era San Francisco. Once a successful businessman worth millions in today's money, Joshua Abraham Norton lost it all on a bad business deal and subsequent litigation. In 1859, appearing to have finally "cracked up," he walked into a San Francisco newspaper office and delivered a proclamation, printed the next day, declaring himself "Norton I, Emperor of the United States."

This began his nearly 21-year "reign" over San Francisco. Using these newspaper decrees, and assisted by a regal bearing and unwavering conceit in his God-given imperial office, Norton managed to successfully command the straightening of the silt-bound Petaluma Creek, accomplished shortly thereafter, in his lifetime, and to plant the idea of a bridge and tunnel to span San Francisco Bay--the Bay Bridge and the Transbay

Tube--in a series of newspaper proclamations. These latter feats of civil engineering were completed decades after the Emperor's death, but his far-sighted decrees were not forgotten by his admiring subjects. All this he accomplished without hardly doing anything at all.

Though destitute, Norton dined for free, rode public conveyances gratis, and no play, lecture, or reading room was closed to him. Such was his adoring public's regard for him. This regard was only increased by his daily rounds in the city, inspecting boardwalks, fireplugs, gutters, roads--even the uniforms of the bobbies on their patrols, who unfailingly saluted the Emperor whenever he strolled past. His ability to achieve without doing, and to get by without financial means, was only enhanced by the popular feeling and affection he built for himself in doing the work of a latter-day people's tribune, in his commanding proclamations and turning an unsleeping eye towards negligence, ineptitude, and malfeasance by those authorities over which Norton also presumed to rule.

This ruling without actual ruling, and doing so by weight of dignity, are concepts in ancient, classical Chinese Taoist philosophy. These are wu-wei ("doing-not-doing") and Te ("virtue-power"), found in the Taoist political manual for the enlightened ruler, the Tao Te Ching, or the "Way and its Power (or Virtue)". The enlightened ruler, or "Sage-king," eschews worldliness, acts impartially and without personal motive, rules without appearing to rule at all, and, through all of these attributes, cultivates a positive popular regard for himself that only reinforces his ability to rule by moral suasion alone.

This thesis therefore asks, Is Norton an embodiment of the Taoist ideal of a Sage-king, and, if so, to what degree?

To answer this question, we will first explore ancient Chinese history and exposit the tenets of philosophical Taoism, along with brief discussions of its rivals, such as Confucianism, among others. This section is largely sourced from memory, so while citations are light, the reader will be suggested further reading, though any good encyclopedia will probably provide most of the same information.

Secondly, we will present the biographical highlights of Norton's life and career as emperor, as well as touch on his enduring popular legacy. It is copiously cited, and the sources we rely upon most heavily are William Drury's biography, Norton I: Emperor of the United States, as well as Emperor Norton: The Mad Monarch of America, by Allen Stanley Lane. These two books represent the only two full book-length treatments of the Emperor's life in detail. Of these, Drury's is the more recent and more thoroughly researched; Lane, though older, and relying more heavily on folklore, is still a good resource.

Third and lastly, we will take a deep dive into the pages of the Tao Te Ching, examining its precepts for enlightened rule, and comparing them to the biographical details of Emperor Norton's reign, finally giving the reader some answer to our thesis question. If the first two parts of this thesis are foundational, the third part is analytical and the crux of the thesis paper. Except where cited, these are, to our knowledge, interpretations unique to this work. Early readers have suggested parts

of this latter part seem circular or discursive, but the intent is that it is rather epicyclical (or perhaps helical), reinforcing and elaborating on previously introduced material as we systematically incorporate additional interpretations moving forward. The reader's indulgence, we hope, will be richly rewarded with a deeper, more thorough-going understanding of the thesis topic and related concepts.

As the author speaks little Chinese, and reads even less, we have necessarily relied on English translations of the Tao Te Ching. The first of these is by famed author Lin Yu-tang, equally accomplished in English as in his own native Chinese. This is a fairly formal translation, translating word-for-word. Where Lin is not entirely clear to us, or to convey some nuance of meaning not apparent in a literal rendition of the text, we have used that of Oliver Benjamin (abbreviated Benj. in citations), which is a more dynamic equivalence--almost a paraphrase--often rendering the text sense-for-sense. Where we were not entirely satisfied by either Lin or Benjamin, we have had recourse to the translation by Gia-fu Feng and Jane English (abbreviated F&E), whose equivalence falls somewhere between Lin and Benjamin, though closer to Lin.

All Chinese characters reproduced herein are traditional ones, as opposed to the simplified writing now used in mainland, Communist China. These traditional glyphs are used by classicists and are still the norm in Taiwan and throughout the Chinese diaspora. We have also elected to use the Wade-Giles system for transliterating Chinese words into Latin script. Though the newer Pinyin system used in mainland China is becom-

ing more widely used in academic and media circles globally, most of our sources are older and employ Wade-Giles, and we did not wish to endlessly mire ourself in conversion tables for every Chinese name and term.

We have used the Turabian/Chicago Style in our writing and citations, with a few expediencies of giving citations inline, as opposed to foot- or end-notes; and listing chapter numbers of the Tao Te Ching by number first, translator's name second. Ordinary page citations follow the traditional convention of author followed by page number. The plural, authorial voice has been used throughout.

In keeping with the values of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, we have attempted where possible to use gender-non-exclusive language. This is sometimes difficult because of male-gendered language used throughout our sources, chiefly relating to the Sage-king, whom the ancient authors assumed would usually, or always, be male. But when not constrained by sources, we have endeavored to use inclusive words and phrasing.

For all modern dollar equivalents of contemporary, 19th-century sums, we have used the Official Data Foundation's Inflation Calculator, the web address for which can be found in the bibliography. No citations for these figures will be given in the text.

Lastly, the artistic depiction of the Emperor found on the title page, based on a historical photograph (http://emperorsbridge.org/emperor/photographs, accessed Aug. 13th, 2019), is the work of the author.

1.0. Overview of ancient Chinese history and Taoism.

1.1. The geographical context.

As with many of the world's most ancient great civilizations--Egypt and its Nile, Mesopotamia and its Euphrates, and so on--China began on and because of a river, the Yellow River, or Huang-ho, so called for the color of its waters, tinted as they are by the fine sands of its source in the west of China and Mongolia. These same powdery sands are lifted high into the atmosphere by fierce desert winds, eventually depositing annually a thin layer of yellow dust all over the lands due east, in Korea, Japan, and Russia.

It is to a great extent the enrichment of this silt, combined with frequent flooding (as was historically true of the Nile) that made the Yellow River plain so fertile (and deadly) an agricultural region, and a meet setting for the rise of a great civilization. A broad, deep, meandering river--the lower parts of which are navigable, facilitating trade--it is an exceedingly long one, being over 3,000 miles long, or roughly the width of the continental United States, if stretched taut.

The pertinent area of the Yellow River basin is the eastern half, particularly the northern bank, bounded by Manchuria to the north, Mongolia to the west, and the Yellow Sea to the east--the ultimate destination of the river's jaundiced waters. The climate may be described as having hot, humid summers and cold, dry winters, in a thin line west to east, bounded by a cold, semi-arid zone to the north and a humid, subtropical

one to the south (World Book Atlas 72-7).

The resulting environment is not unlike the Mid-Atlantic states we are familiar with here in the U.S., including dense forests, thriving vegetation, and fertile soils--all key natural resources needed by any up-and-coming complex society.

1.2. The historical context: pre-history; the Hsia and Shang dynasties.

Prehistoric China entered the Bronze Age around 3000 B.C., a thousand years earlier than in the Mediterranean basin. Iron, though, was a late development compared to Western civilizations--some 500 years after that Mediterranean and Near-Eastern development, in the 6th c. B.C. Curiously, writing was a comparatively late development as well, occurring more than a thousand years after writing in the West, ca. 1500 B.C. It is in this preliterate, Bronze Age era that we encounter the semi-mythical Hsia dynasty. (For a treatment of ancient Chinese history, see Hucker 25-77.)

Little factual is known about the Hsia, apart from archaeological remains and the much later reports of Chou dynasty (1046-256 B.C.) historians. Indeed, until the archaeological discovery of settlements, graves, and associated objects, most modern historians dismissed the Hsia as mere legend, like Atlantis or Tarshish, existing only in the imaginations of ancient authors.

It is with the Shang dynasty (ca. 1600-1046 B.C.), commencing just

as writing in China was beginning, that scholars begin to find contemporaneous records of early Chinese civilization.

The Shang dynasty is said to have begun when the last, "cruel" (why this is necessarily so will be discussed below) Hsia king, Chieh, was defeated by a scion of a cadet branch of the royal family, King T'ang.

That the Shang were a literate society should not be overstated. What writing there was, was for the benefit of the royal court, in the recording of divinations. There were as yet no annals, odes, or treatises, merely inscriptions. Divination was done in the form of placing turtle shells or ox scapulae in a fire and then examining the resulting pattern of cracks. Indeed, the forms of the glyphs themselves developed from divinatory crack patterns.

Much of the activities of the Shang centered on the cult of the king and state. As shown, divination--from cracked carapaces and bones, as well as astronomical observations--was a key component of Shang religion. So too was ancestor worship, particularly royal ancestors, and the king as living ancestor. An amorphous supreme deity, Ti, was honored as head of a constellation of deified kings, royal ancestors, and nature spirits. Sometimes this worship included human sacrifice, both on an altar and in the grave, in burying alive retainers and favorite wives for the purpose of serving the king in the afterlife.

This complex, ritually-oriented culture required and produced the first durable goods in Chinese civilization. Jade knives, translucent and thin but extraordinary in durability; bronze beakers and cauldrons

for various ritual preparations and imbibings. The Shang also cast bells--whole carillons representing entire scales, with each bell producing two tones, depending on the position struck. Additionally, the Shang produced many consumer wares such as axes, farming implements, pottery, and even highly-polished bronze mirrors. As a material culture, the Shang rivaled any other contemporary civilization.

Apart from religion, the life of the average Shang subject continued to revolve around agriculture--rice, millet, emmer--and animal husbandry--fowl, swine, and oxen. There is no reason to believe women were treated worse in Shang China than elsewhere in the ancient world--indeed, better, if the fates of favorite royal wives are excepted. Even then, the favored concubine of a Shang king, Fu-hao, was a celebrated general and high priestess of the royal cult. Predeceasing the king (fortunately), she was buried with great pomp and splendor.

After 13 kings and 500 years, Shang rule ended under the "depraved king" T'i-hsin, dethroned in a rebellion by the Duke of Chou, Fa (posthumously called Wu). T'i-hsin committed suicide--regarded as an enormous impiety against his ancestors, proving his immorality and unfitness to rule. His successor was allowed to "retire" to a small vassal state, under guard, to continue the ritual observances of the Shang family cult.

From there on out, the focus of state worship would be on the Chou kings, as well as a new paramount deity, T'ien.

## 1.3. Rise and decline of the Chou

The Chou dynasty commences in 1046 B.C. While eventually conflated with the Shang god Ti, T'ien (Heaven) gave legitimacy to the Chou, who, without some divine imprimatur, might otherwise been regarded as usurpers. A new imperial ideology was promulgated, called T'ien-ming, the "Mandate of Heaven," to legitimize the Chou right to rule.

Not unlike the divine right of kings in early modern Europe, the Mandate of Heaven maintained that kings rule with the favor and assent of T'ien, on account of their supposed superior moral virtue. Should a dynasty become corrupt and morally unfit, T'ien revokes its mandate and transmits it to a more worthy rival, who then may legitimately seize power. This is how the Chou explained (retroactively) the fall of the "bad" Hsia kings to the "good" Shang kings, and then how the "bad" late Shang kings were rightly overthrown by the virtuous Chou.

This ideology of course cuts both ways--it legitimates the present dynastic power, so long as it maintains its virtue, but sets the stage for a justifiable removal from power when it fails to meet Heaven's example. Thus, in time, T'ien-ming would comfort rebels as well as kings.

The Chou, as it turned out, were good for the development of Chinese civilization. During their first several centuries (up to 771 B.C., discussed below), a corpus of literature, recognizable as literature, came about with collections of songs and poems, ritual manuals, and astronomical and agricultural treatises.

There was a great refinement under the Chou of the more rudimentary features of Shang civilization, with the further development of art, music, ritual, and statecraft. The population grew and became materially prosperous, indicating the country was being governed well.

Trouble for the Chou, however, began in 779 B.C., when an earthquake struck and partially destroyed their capital. Barbarians took advantage of the ensuing chaos and attacked from Mongolia. These disasters were widely regarded as bad portents for the dynasty. Though the Chou moved their capital eastward in 771, and continued to rule another five centuries, it was in an increasingly diminished capacity.

1.4. The Spring and Autumn and Warring States eras, 771-221 B.C.

The bright flowering of Chinese culture under the early Chou had come to be regarded as a "golden age," synonymous with what was thought to be the most authentic, beautiful, and enduring qualities of classical China. The dimunition of Chou authority, and a simultaneous sense of cultural decline, was confusing and distressing to the Chinese of that era. Had the Chou lost the Mandate of Heaven? Had the king become immoral? And what was the way back to the golden age?

These questions sparked a time of great intellectual ferment, with the beginning, multiplying, and flourishing of diverse new philosophies, the so-called "Hundred Schools." These schools were less metaphysical as practical, dealing with the state, morals, and public virtue. They diag-

nosed the practical cause of societal evils humanistically, and prescribed concrete solutions. In this way, the Hundred Schools may be said to be chiefly concerned with ethics.

Most of these schools have been lost to historical record, owing to the purges during the later Ch'in dynasty (221-206 B.C.), but the chief schools were Legalism, Mohism, Confucianism, and Taoism. Of these traditions, only the latter two survive today.

## 1.5. Lao-tzu and the Tao Te Ching.

The purported author of the Tao Te Ching (道德經 , the Classic of the Way and Its Virtue), was Lao-tzu ( 老子 ). Lao-tzu, meaning "old master," is a sobriquet; Master Lao was born in the village of Ch'u-jen in the state of Ch'u as either Li Erh or Li Tan. The date of his birth is lost. Traditionally it was believed he flourished in the 6th c. B.C., making him an elder contemporary of Confucius; some researchers, however, contend he came later, in the 5th and 4th centuries, making him a younger contemporary. The discrepancy is important in that it would indicate whether Taoism was a reaction to Confucianism, or perhaps the other way around. Whatever the answer, the controversy clearly demonstrates the legendary character of Lao-tzu, in every sense.

Master Lao was a ranking government officer in the imperial capital of Lo-yang, with charge of the state archives. Lao-tzu acquired such a reputation for wisdom and sagacity, that, when he retired and quit the

kingdom for Tibet (legendarily sitting atop a water buffalo), a border guard implored him to leave behind some work that would preserve his teaching. Sighing, he tarried long enough to write 81 short chapters, or verses--no more than 5,000 words in total--of what is now known as the Tao Te Ching.

These chapters deal with a range of subjects, written for the enlightened ruler (and not individuals per se). The chapters counsel the ruler on the cyclical nature of the universe; naturalness, spontaneity, effortlessness, yielding, and receptivity; the limitations of knowledge; and how all these factor, of course, into good governance.

The Tao Te Ching is not the only Taoist "classic." It is part of a triune canon of Taoist philosophical texts, the others being the I Ching, or "Book of Changes," a divinatory manual with Lao-esque interpretations of readings received by the tossing of sticks or coins, the core text of which may in fact predate the Tao Te Ching by centuries; and the Chuang-tzu (莊子), named for the author of the same name (369-286 B.C.). Unlike Master Lao's short, succinct, poetic prose, Master Chuang's style is expansive, discursive, and perhaps wandering at points.

A fourth work sometimes added to the canon is the Art of War, by Sun-tzu (544-496 B.C.), who applies Taoist ideas to politics and warfare in a way reminiscent of Niccolo Machiavelli's treatise on ruthless realpolitik, The Prince.

While an examination of all four of these texts together would be fruitful, it is the Tao Te Ching that will bear most immediately, and ac-

cessibly, to the thesis topic.

1.6. The metaphysics of the Tao (道).

The Tao, or "Way," is the organizing principle that guides the universe and its ebbing and flowing, waxing and waning. The Tao Te Ching would seem to indicate that there is a single source of creation, that it is primordial, dark, and mysterious. These cosmo-etiological speculations are secondary to Master Lao. The text mentions no deities or divinities, except a reverence for the impersonal, unembodied Tao, and the work may be viewed as implicitly agnostic. What matters, in a practical sense, is the cyclical, pendulum-like nature of the universe. When Heraclitus says "All is flux," and the Buddha says, "The only permanence is impermanence," Lao-tzu would agree.

The ebb-and-flow nature of the Tao is famously represented by the yin-yang (陰陽) symbol. One half light, one half dark; one half male, one half female; one half airy, one half earthy; one half active, one half passive--and so on, each simultaneously displacing and yielding to the other, and each carrying a kernel of the other within itself. It can be safely said that the Way eschews absolutes, and deals most exclusively in shades of gray.

(For a good introduction to Taoist thought, see Jacob Needleman's introduction to Feng and English, pp. v-xxxiii, and Lin's introduction to his own translation, pp. 3-22.)

1.7. Wu-wei (無爲): the ethics of non-action.

At the center of Taoism is the sense that humanity has lost its natural, authentic self due to denaturing aspects of civilization and its pretensions, conceits, contrived manners, guile, deceit, fraud, and coercion. Thus, the Taoist prescription is a return to nature, naturalness, (tzu-jan, 自然), the human authenticity that held before the rise of civilization.

This "fall from grace" is not a unique feature of Taoism. The Abrahamic religions hold that humans have exiled themselves from paradise by their hubris, in tasting of the fruit of the Tree of Knowlege of Good and Evil (Gen. 3). "Knowledge of good and evil" can reasonably interpreted anthropologically as the transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to agriculture and urbanization. Hunter-gatherer cultures were free to roam, take of nature's abundance, and enjoy a relatively egalitarian polity. Contrastingly, with the rise of agriculture, people became tied to the land, land which must be violently defended, women and children became little more than chattel, made to toil and breed, where in earlier eras they would have been free to wander the wilderness in search of forage and small game.

Indeed, skeletal remains show that nutrition suffered under early agriculture, possibly due to a reduction in dietary diversity. But farming was more reliable than hunting, and caloric surpluses meant that the farmer could be exploited in terms of extortion first (if he could not

drive off interlopers), taxes later, in support of a host of non-farming urban dwellers: kings (to provide protection), priests (to legitimize the king, imbuing him with divine favor), and a host of soldiers, scribes, artists, craftsmen, traders and merchants (Diamond 64-6). Through these lead to cultural elaboration, usually enlisted to strengthen the state ideology and national myths. This is the development, contrived, artificial, inauthentic, and exploitative, against which the Taoists rebelled, particularly in the unraveling of Chou society and the straining seams of civilization.

A corollary concept is spontaneity (also translated as tzu-jan). If one rejects artifice and embraces one's human nature, one will act without guile or much deliberation, doing what naturally occurs as it occurs to one, without ulterior motives or secret design. A saying of the Ch'an (Zen) master Pai-chang Huai-hai (fl. 8th c. A.D.) summarizes neatly what is meant by spontaneity: "I eat when I'm hungry, sleep when I'm tired. Fools may mock me, but the wise man understands." (The relationship between Ch'an and Taoism will be discussed below.) There is no sense in Taoism that the present life is bad or the body evil. The "Superior man" (chun-tzu, 君子 ) will attend to the needs of his body without shame or much thought, as they arise.

The Taoist disdain for all things unnatural--artifice, plotting, scheming, coercion, exploitation, oppression, etc., and the social ills arising from civilized life--leads to the concept of wu-wei. This central idea is literally translated as "no-doing," but has been variously

translated as "non-action," "active non-action," "creative non-action", "spontaneous creativity," and so on. All point to a naturalness and spontaneity, without which wu-wei cannot exist.

Wu-wei is patience and receptivity. When a situation or quandary arises, the Sage does not act with force or initiative, but allows the solution to arise organically, and to choose its own time and place. A similar idea exists in Christianity, when one speaks of "Waiting on the Spirit," but here no agency is ascribed, and the way forward presents itself naturalistically, as causal a force as any in nature.

Force, however, is the furthest thing from wu-wei. To force a situation, to actively push a solution, to move with calculation--any act that smells of politicking, ambition, social maneuvering--invites calamity and disaster. A modern parallel might be a seized bolt, or a recalcitrant knob or dial. Gentle, patient coaxing may yield the desired result, but hurried, violent force will just as likely snap off the offending piece, causing a bigger problem than if it had been left alone to begin with.

This remains a counter-cultural idea in our own time. Our society rewards the acquisition of status, power, influence, and material wealth. Common are phrases like "sink or swim," "do or die," "up or out," "to the victor go the spoils," and "he who dies the with the most, wins." There can be no winners without losers, no worthwhile existence without winning, and big. Modern life in the West, particularly America, is seen as a zero-sum game, predicated upon domination, coercion, and exploitation--

violently, if need be. The whole of our society is structured to keep the winners winning, and compel us all to "keep up with the Joneses" (or the Kardashians, as the case may be).

The Sage, of course, views this all as unnatural and inhumane, and treats it as anathema. It is corrosive, and exhausting to even behold. Thus the Sage, the "Superior man," avoids it, withdrawing to a safe distance to live in nature, naturally, away from the ambitions and compulsions of society, according to his more authentic self. He attends to his basic needs and desires little else than what will satisfy those needs. He lives simply, without material desire, in a contented poverty. He does not go looking for trouble: he is no social climber, and he has no stomach for adventures. Like the popular television painter Bob Ross, if the Sage has a "happy buck" in his pocket, and a song in his heart, what therefore can he lack?

The quality of the Sage thus imbued with the ethic of wu-wei is Te (德), as contained in the title of the Tao Te Ching. Like wu-wei, Te defies simple translation, meaning "power," or "virtue," or even "charisma" or "magnetism," and, indeed, it is all of these. Being natural, spontaneous, unforced and unforcing, the Sage exudes Te. His actions are skilled, smooth without study or effort. Because he does not insist, things simply fall into place for him, and he is attractive to all he meets. He glides through life without resistance, because he does not desire anything and is not disappointed when he does not get it. This lack of desire only increases the trust others place in him, and so his

store of Te, his magnetism and influence, is further increased.

Indeed, wanting, and wanting Te, is a repulsive force to Te. Paradoxically, to pursue Te is to lose it. (In current youth parlance, this is could be called being "thirsty," i.e., an over-eagerness for a date or social media attention which is off-putting.) It may perhaps be gently cultivated, but over-preening desire destroys it. It is not unlike the central paradox in Buddhism, where seemingly one cannot cease to desire without the desire to cease desiring.

1.8. The politics of the Tao.

As has been said above, the Tao Te Ching may have individual spiritual implications and applications for one's own life, but it is more explicitly a policy manual for the enlightened ruler, the "Sage-king" (shung wang, 聖王 ).

Apart from its assumptions about authentic human nature, the Tao Te Ching also makes assumptions about the nature of primitive, pre-urban societies. Before the rise of cities, people lived simply in small villages, without the trappings of culture, or hierarchies, satisfied with having merely enough. They kept weapons, but let them rust; they lived within sight of other villages, but never ventured to visit them (Tao Te Ching, ch. 80). Where there was a king, he only functioned to store up grain for the people against a famine. Thus, without venturing forth, there were no comparisons and so no coveting, no coveting and so no wars

of theft and conquest, no warlords, no armies, no empires, and no cultural elaborations and contrivances (laws, policing, priesthoods, etc.), designed to prop up the rule of aristocrats and professional bureaucracies.

All of these structures, from the Taoist perspective, are corrosive to society and deadly to naturalness and spontaneity. Thus the Sage-king, in ruling people, aims to restore the conditions that prevailed before the rise of cities, to free the natural spontaneity of people and ensure social harmony. Given the chaos of the dissolution of Chou power, social harmony was the chief concern of all the Hundred Schools, and remains a perennial concern in China down to the present day (e.g., current mainland Chinese president Xi Jinping's grand political program, titled "The Harmonious Society").

The practical advice for the Sage-king is first-most to avoid extremes and allow progress to develop in its own time (ibid. ch. 29). He does not use force, because though violence may yield quicker results, but these are illusory and will lead to catastrophes down the road (ch. 30). He maintains an army, but does not use it; when he does, it is only as a last resort and is to be lamented, not celebrated (chs. 30, 80). He rules the people lightly, like one "would cook a fish" (ch. 60). He cultivates in them simplicity, to reduce desires and contention, but takes pains to avoid being seen to do so, so that the people will think they've ruled themselves (chs. 3, 4, 65). He uses his wisdom not to make the people wise--lest they become haughty and quarrelsome--but quietly uses it to make the people simple, so they may remain natural, uncon-

trived, and sincere. He disciplines himself, and keeps his wit from biting, speaks honestly but without causing offense, deals directly without being brusque (ch. 58). Being humble, and the people sincere, society becomes cohesive, a necessary quality of a harmonious society--the opposite of late Chou rule--which is the ultimate aim of all the Sage-king says and does.

Of course, all this seems like work, and so the paradox of wu-wei rears its head again. The Sage avoids all extremes, so taking an absolute laissez-faire position would be too categorical. Thus we may view this application of wu-wei as not doing-undoing, but doing little and so unobtrusively as not to be seen doing anything at all.

1.9. Taoism and associated thought systems.

The philosophical Taoism (tao-chia, 道家 ) described above should not be confused with religious Taoism (tao-chiao, 道教 ), which is a salvation religion, with adherents hoping to achieve immortality and freedom through ascetic and alchemical practices, breathing exercises, rituals, and praying for the intercession of "the Immortals," earlier practitioners of Tao-chiao who have themselves achieved immortality and a kind of deification.

(For a treatment of comparative Chinese religions, see Julia Ching, Chinese Religions.)

Tao-chiao frequently overlaps with Faism (fa-chiao, 法教 ), popular

or folk religion, with its veneration of gods and ancestors, propitiatory rites, exorcism of ghosts and demons, divination (the aforementioned I Ching), geomancy (feng shui), and shamanic practices. The author has observed temples in Taiwan where both schools are practically merged, sometimes with Mahayana Buddhism (particularly the cult of the Celestial Buddha, Ami-t'uo Fo) thrown in for good measure.

Taoism (Tao-chia)'s famous sometime-rival, sometime-complement, is Confucianism (ju-chia, 儒家 ), the school of thought expounded by Confucius (K'ung-fu Tzu, 孔子 ), 551-479 B.C. Where Taoism advocates for simplicity and non-action, Confucianism advocates for the cultivation of virtue through mastering personal morality and the Chou classical canon of manners, ritual, and music, these seen as having a civilizing effect. As with Taoism, Confucianism rejects force, and seeks to provide a moral example which will naturally attract (Te) adherence to the order and rectitude of the early Chou ideal. Indeed, Confucianism has been called the yang to Taoism's yin, the one waxing and waning into the other in a complementary way, going hand and glove to complete the Chinese worldview.

Lastly, there is the Ch'an ( 禪 ) school of Buddhism, which is most certainly a systhesis of Buddhist liberation from desire, with Taoist cultivation of the simple, rejection of artifice and social intercourse, and reversal of social expectations--all in an attempt to shock the mind into a state of enlightenment, the spiritual immortality to Tao-chiao's physical immortality.

Of course, unlike with Western religions, none of these schools are

inherently mutually exclusive, and the everyday Chinese person may be of several at once, or in succession. To adhere to only one, under all circumstances, would be un-nuanced and a kind of extreme, and thus alien to a Chinese sensibility.

## 2.0. Biographical overview of the Emperor Norton.

### 2.1. Early life.

By every account except his own (this will be discussed below), Joshua Abraham Norton was born February 4th, 1818, in Deptford, Kent (now in London) to John and Sarah Norton, English Jews. In 1820, when Norton was "about two" by his father's reckoning, the family joined 5,000 other Britons in emigrating to Algoa Bay (now Port Elizabeth) on the central coast of South Africa (Drury 15).

There John was something of a town's founding father, and was instrumental in establishing a synagogue for himself and his co-religionists. John set up a successful ship's chandlery (candle-making business), where young Joshua was a clerk, until 1841, when the family relocated to Cape Town. There John expanded his interests to ship's provisioner. Joshua went into trade for himself, but was an indifferent businessman, and went bankrupt inside 18 months. Afterwards, he would return to clerking for his father (ibid. 22-4, Lane 20). There is also suggestion he may have served in the colonial rifles, but "(h)ow long or how well he served in that capacity we are not informed" (Lloyd 130).

Ultimately, John faired little better, and by his death in 1848, his business was practically insolvent. Given this, it is unclear how Joshua obtained an inheritance, but it was sizeable at $40,000, today worth about $1.8 million. Shortly after, in 1849, news of the California Gold Rush reached South Africa, and Norton moved with his tidy fortune to San

Francisco aboard the Hamburg steamer Franzeska. Norton arrived at the Golden Gate on Nov. 23rd, 1849, just soon enough to earn the honor of being a "Forty-Niner" (Drury 26, Lane 20).

2.2. The businessman.

Immediately upon landing in San Francisco, Norton rented an office from the eccentric--and fantastically rich--real estate mogul, James Lick (of Lick Observatory fame), in an adobe located at Jackson and Montgomery Streets. Wisely, he did not become a miner, but instead became a provisioner to the maritime trade that had sprung up in California during the Gold Rush (Drury 27, Lane 27-31). (For a treatment of mid-19th c. Californian history, see Robt. Chandler, California: An Illustrated History, 31-122.)

Norton soon bought a grounded storeship, the Genessee, to use as a warehouse, and soon expanded his interests to real estate and speculation in commodities. In a matter of three years, he expanded his fortune to $250,000--today worth $8.2 million (Lumea par. 10).

Norton became a respected member of the community, and was received into the society of bankers and magnates. He was a founding member of the Freemasons' Occidental Lodge No. 22. When, in 1851, a citizen's "Vigilance Committee" was formed to capture, try, and execute arsonists and thieves plaguing the city, Norton, along with most other prominent

businessmen, joined. Norton's motivation, apart from fitting in, was to restore civic order, which (order generally) he viewed as a paramount pre-condition for any prosperity or peace (Martin 28). However, he seemed to have a distaste for the Committee's vigilante methods and want of due process. When the Committee reconvened in 1856 to once again mete out rough justice, Norton did not join, though it might have benefited his business (Drury 32, 48).

In 1852, Norton made what ultimately would be a fatal business decision. After a bad rice harvest that year, there was little rice to be found in San Francisco. Rice, of course, is a staple of the Chinese diet, and Chinese people made up 10 percent of San Francisco's population. Norton contracted to buy an entire shipload of rice steaming up from Peru, for $25,000 ($820,000 today) at 12-1/2 cents ($4.10) a pound, hoping to corner the market. The market price went up and up, topping out at 36 cents a pound. Had Norton sold earlier, at 30 or 32 cents, he still would have made a very handsome profit and avoided disaster. However, not one but three ships arrived from Peru, and the price of the grain dropped to three cents a pound overnight (ibid. 41-2).

Norton attempted to void the contract, on the basis that the sample he had been shown before he bought the shipment was far superior to what he had actually received. He lost the lawsuit, won an appeal, and lost the appeal of that appeal. It is hard to understand how a $25,000 loss could bankrupt a business worth $250,000, but it would seem, rather than cutting his losses and moving on, Norton became fixated, fighting a bit-

ter and protracted legal battle, and ultimately squandered his fortune on lawyers' fees (ibid. 44, Lane 46).

After the disastrous rice deal, Norton's luck in business had run out entirely. He had to sell his real estate holdings, and his mortgaged properties were foreclosed upon (by none other than William Tecumseh Sherman, then a banker in San Francisco). He moved from a fashionable suite to a workman's boarding house, and was banished from his Masonic lodge for being in arrears on his dues. He was sued for embezzlement by a business partner, forcing him to liquidate his remaining assets. Norton even attempted to run for tax collector, which would have provided relief and a comfortable living, but he was blocked by local Democrats for not being native-born (Drury 54).

He appeared to eke out a marginal living selling beans, coffee, linseed oil, etc., on commission, with ads for his business appearing in the local newspapers. But by late 1858, the ads had stopped, and Joshua Norton had, for all appearances, dropped off the face of the earth.

## 2.3. Norton mounts the throne; the Civil War.

As far back as 1852, an acquaintance recalled Norton as saying, "If I were emperor of the United States, you would see a great many changes effected." Apparently, the idea of being an emperor had been percolating in his mind for years. So when he stepped out of the obscurity into which he had fallen, his action should have come as no surprise to this

acquaintance. He dropped into the offices of the Evening Bulletin and left the following proclamation to be printed the next day, September 17th, 1859:

> At the peremptory request of a large majority of the citizens of these United States, I, Joshua Norton, formerly of Algoa Bay, Cape of Good Hope, and now for the past nine years and ten months of San Francisco, California, declare and proclaim myself Emperor of these U.S., and in virtue of the authority thereby in me invested, do hereby order and direct the representatives of the different States of the Union to assemble in Musical Hall of this city on the 1st day of February next, then and there to make such alterations in the existing laws of the Union as may ameliorate the evils under which the country is laboring, and thereby cause confidence to exist, both at home and abroad, in our stability and integrity.
>
> Norton I, Emperor of the United States.

With that extraordinary printed decree, Norton began his 21-year career as emperor of America, the first of many striking, elegant, and often sagely proclamations he would subsequently publish (ibid. 57-8, Lane 53-4). (Who were these citizens clamoring for his imperial leadership is not known. However, other, later instances where he used the word "peremptory" seem to suggest he thought of the word meaning something like, "Anticipating the eventuality of...")

(Norton's proclamations can be found throughout Drury and Lane, and the website of the self-styled "Imperial Government of Norton I," found in the bibliography, among many others.)

Chief of the "evils to be ameliorated" was the impending Civil War. As with his participation in the Vigilance Committee, order was his overriding concern, and so he offered himself as a supreme arbiter to settle, in a fair and orderly fashion, the questions of slavery and states'

rights.

One echo of his participation in the first Vigilance Committee was his moral indignation at the hanging of John Brown, whom he held to be insane and ought to have been committed to an asylum instead. He wrote in the Evening Bulletin in late 1859,

> Disapproving of the act of Gov. Wise of Virginia in hanging Gen. Brown at Charlestown, Va., on 2nd December;
>
> And considering that said Brown was insane and that he ought to have been sent to the Insane Asylum for capturing the State of Virginia with seventeen men;
>
> Now know all men that I do hereby discharge him, Henry A. Wise, from said office, and appoint John C. Breckenridge, of Kentucky, to said office of Governor of our Province of Virginia.
>
> Norton I, Emperor of the United States of America.

Was it Norton's desire for the observance of due process (a concern that seems to have soured him on the Vigilance Committee), sympathy for abolitionism, or did the execution of a clearly--to Norton's mind--insane man hit too close to home? As he would one day admit, he knew "many others" thought him mad (Drury 60-1, Lane 62-3).

Order and due process, and the well-founded perception of rampant corruption, caused Norton to strike at the heart of political chaos with the following sweeping proclamation (also in the Evening Bulletin) in October, 1859, mere weeks into his newly-inaugurated reign:

> It is represented to us that the universal sufferage, as now existing throughout the Union, is abused; that fraud and corruption prevent a fair and proper expression of the public voice; that open violation of the laws are constantly occurring, caused by mobs, parties, factions and undue influence of political sects; that the citizen has not that protection of person and property which he is entitled to by paying his pro rata of the expense of Government--in consequence of which, We

> do hereby abolish Congress, and it is therefore abolished; and We order and desire the representatives of all parties interested to appear at the Musical Hall of this city on the first of February next, and then and there take the most effective steps to remedy the evil complained of.
>
> Norton I, Emperor of the United States of America.

Undetected by all was the subtext of the citizen's "pro rata," which hinted at Norton's undiminished outrage with the courts, that, despite his paying his taxes and acting in good faith, had failed to protect him from fraud and unjust litigation. Unsurprising for one who had poured out his entire fortune on legal fees, his grievance was undying.

What would have been the effect had the civil authorities obeyed the Emperor's fiat? Could the Civil War, and 620,000 war dead, have been averted? Alas, we'll never know, as the order went unheeded. Consequently, when Congress was seated that next January, Norton indignantly decreed in the Bulletin:

> Whereas a body of men calling themselves the National Congress are now in session in Washington City, in violation of our Imperial edict of the 12th October last, declaring the said Congress abolished;
>
> Whereas it is necessary for the repose of our Empire that the said decree should be strictly complied with;
>
> Now therefore we do hereby Order and Direct Major-General Scott, the Commander-in-Chief of our Armies, immediately upon receipt of this our Decree, to proceed with a suitable force and clear the Halls of Congress.
>
> Norton I, Emperor of the United States.

This too provoked no response from authorities. If the government took no notice, the Bulletin's readers paid close, if bemused, attention.

Evidently fed up with governmental intransigence, the Emperor took the unprecendented step, also in the Bulletin, of abolishing the Republic

altogether:

> Whereas it is necessary for our Peace, Prosperity and Happiness, as also to the National Advancement of the people of the United States, that they should dissolve the Republican form of government and establish in its stead an Absolute Monarchy;
>
> Now therefore we, Norton I, by the Grace of God Emperor of the Thirty-three States and multitude of Territories of the United States of North America, do hereby dissolve the Republic of the United States, and it is hereby dissolved;
>
> And all laws made from and after this date, either by the National Congress or any State Legislature, shall be null and of no effect.
>
> All Governors, and all other persons in authority, shall maintain order by enforcing the heretofore existing laws and regulations until the necessary alterations can be effected. Given under our hand and seal, at Headquarters, San Francisco, this 26th day of July, 1860.
>
> Norton I.

The Republic grinded on, even as it lurched towards civil war.

As the Civil War got underway in 1861, Norton took to wearing both Union and Confederate uniforms, or some mixture of the two. Though he was a Democrat in his former life, he could not condone the disorder of rebellious, unilateral secession, disorder being, to his mind, the cardinal sin. Nevertheless, he was emperor of all Americans, North, South, and West, and could hardly show a preference (Drury 109-10 interstitial).

Meanwhile, even as his subjects prepared to slaughter each other, and then set about it with great energy, Norton would not be distracted from foreign affairs. In Mexico, the Emperor of the French, Napoleon III, had set a Hapsburg scion, Maximilian, upon the throne of a puppet Mexican Empire. Being preoccupied with the domestic strife, the (imperially proscribed) American government did not pay much attention to

European interference in the Western Hemisphere. Norton, however, was having none of it. Assuming Mexico's plight as his own, he had printed the following:

> Whereas it is an undoubted truth that Mexico is entirely unfit to manage her own affairs, the country being in a constant state of internal distraction, anarchy and civil war; and
>
> Whereas His Imperial Majesty Napoleon III is throwing his protecting arm around unfortunate Italy, we consider it our duty to shield and protect bleeding Mexico:
>
> Now therefore We do hereby order and direct that a Convention of the Nation shall assemble, in the Halls of the Montezumas, on the 5th of July next--then and there to adopt such measures as will effectively protect her from future internal dissensions and give security for her future stability, and protection to the great foreign interests;
>
> And We also do hereby order and direct 10,000 troops of our army to assemble in the said city of Mexico, on the 5th day of July next, to enforce a proper and firm government adapted to the wants of the nation, to be composed of the proper men for such an object.
>
> Norton I, Emperor of the United States of North America.

Italy refers to Napoleon III's other imperial hobby horse, Italian unification. There is no indication that Norton prepared for a trip to Mexico City that July, but it is certain the proposed constitutional convention (at bayonet's point) never occurred. The more's the pity, as the result of obeying the Emperor's edict could scarcely have turned out worse than what actually occurred in Mexico at that time. Regardless, Norton would soon and from then on append "Protector of Mexico" to his imperial title (Lane 89-91).

For, while unheeded by his rebellious public servants, Norton was coming to be celebrated by the local populace, who delighted in these newspaper proclamations. They were a touch of whimsy in troubled times

and a welcome distraction from war and economic worry (Drury 61, 68; Martin 36-7). Readers may have even thought some of his ideas were sensible, and would have liked to see them carried out. Whatever admixture of interests Norton's edicts held for subscribers, newspapers--and there was a lively competition of these in 1860s San Francisco--tripped over themselves to be the imperial organ of Norton's august scribblings. Sometimes they would even forge decrees, hoping to capture a bit more of the Emperor's popularity and sell even more papers (Drury 112).

2.4. The Civil War ends; Reconstruction.

A one-time Democrat who once tried to run for tax collector on that party's ticket only to be blocked from doing so, Norton nevertheless retained his Democratic sympathies, and so was no great fan of Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party. When he sacked Governor Wise of Virginia, he appointed a Democrat to fill the position. But, party loyalties aside, the Emperor's complaint with Lincoln seemed to be the conduct of the war, which Norton certainly saw as regrettable, chaotic, and wasteful. Recapitulating his earlier decrees abolishing the Republic and calling for a new constitutional convention--which surely would have ratified his rule--he tried one last time to check Lincoln in his first term. Writing in the Daily Alta California:

> We, Norton I, do hereby decree that the offices of President, Vice President, and Speaker of the House of Representatives are, from and after this date, abolished.

> We further decree that the Senate of the United States elect a prominent Democrat as their presiding officer, to act as President until the next election, and to reconstruct the Cabinet according to our wishes hereafter to be declared.
>
> Done at our palace this 21st day of December, A.D. 1862.

Unheeded, Norton bided his time, and placed his hopes in the candidacy of (cashiered) Union general George McClellan, the Democratic nominee for president in 1864. His Majesty would be disappointed. After the election, in a fit of pique, and not trusting the Easterners presentingly blowing each other to smithereens, Norton turned to the state legislature in Sacramento, hoping they would prove more loyal subjects, to put an end to this almighty mess--and their own jobs while they were at it (Lane 104-5). He had the following delivered to the state capitol:

One Government! One Nation! One Empire!

Proclamation

> The lawmakers now assembled in Sacramento are hereby commanded to proclaim the Empire of the United States, and forthwith disperse.
>
> Norton I, Emperor

The Legislature did not in fact proclaim the Empire, and obstinately continued to exist. They once paid for a new uniform for the Emperor (his wardrobe had become somewhat threadbare), and on another occasion, contemplated giving him a stipend, but ultimately were no more loyal than the government seated--also obstinately--in Washington.

The Civil War came to an end in April, 1865, and Lincoln was shot by an assassin six days later. It is unknown what the Emperor thought of the assassination, though he once quoted "the lamented Lincoln('s)" sec-

ond inaugural address (Drury 161-2). But it was certain that he was no enthusiast for Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, a Democrat, who was already widely disliked without the addition of the Emperor's disapprobation (ibid. 132-3). Johnson was then botching Reconstruction, and incompetence, for Norton, trumped any party loyalties he may once have had. Distrusting Johnson to serve ex-Confederates their just deserts, Norton had a solution: the imperial Person himself would try the rebels and mete out justice:

> ANDREW JOHNSON, you are commanded forthwith to pay us a visit, at our headquarters, San Francisco, Cal., and bring the prisoners, Jefferson Davis, J. C. Breckenridge, and the keeper of the Libby Prison, for a National trial, before us in person.

(Lane, 107; date and publication not given.)

No such trial took place, but the Emperor did not give up on the idea of brokering a deal between the Johnson, the Republicans, and the former Confederates. In September, 1866, he had a broadside printed:

> PROCLAMATION OF THE EMPEROR NORTON I
>
> If North or South won't do, then Come to Neutral Ground.
>
> Whereas it is necessary to the safety, protection and interests of the American people, that they should now meet in council, and make such alterations in the Constitution and form of government as will secure them from future external and internal strife:
>
> Therefore we, Norton I, gratia Dei, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, do hereby command an election of two delegates from each State and Territory of the United States, to assemble in the town of Petaluma, California, on the 15th day of January next, 1867, for the object herein expressed.
>
> Norton I.

When this eminently sensible offer was ignored, Norton had finally

enough of Johnson's malignant bungling. Writing in the Daily Alta:

OFF WITH HIS HEAD!

> So much for Andy! The Supreme Court of the United States is hereby commanded to try Andrew Johnson for usurpation of our Imperial authority and prerogatives, and if found guilty, behead him or send him here to black the Emperor's boots.
>
> Norton I.

This would have been a very popular newspaper item, and in fact antedates and anticipates Johnson's actual impeachment by two years. But it is as likely, at least in part, pseudepigraphical, as the Emperor was not given to threatening execution. The sentiment of the piece, however, he would have shared, regardless of any misattribution or tampering with his copy, depending (ibid. 145).

In any case, Norton did not like Andrew Johnson, and surely was wroth with the rebellious Supreme Court--which, to be fair, he had previously abolished with the rest of the government in 1860--who failed in their duty to deprive Johnson of his liberty or uppermost member.

The Emperor blamed the party system for infecting the body politic with rancor and division (Lane lll). So, in 1869, he had the following run in the San Francisco Herald:

> Norton I, Dei Gratia, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, being desirous of allaying the dissensions of party strife now existing within our realm, do hereby dissolve and abolish the Democratic and Republican parties, and also do hereby decree disenfranchisement and imprisonment, for no more than ten nor less than five years, to all persons leading to any violation of this our imperial decree.

It went unacknowledged. "Had it been obeyed," Lane (lll) sadly

opines, "(it) would have gone far toward making a paradise of the Empire, and which even today would work wonders if enforced."

2.5. Daily life and habits.

Emperor Norton's appearance was singular. Thin early in his reign, he verged on paunchy later in his second decade as emperor. His height was neither so tall nor so short as to be remarked upon. An examination of his photos shows that he was about six heads tall, which is an ordinary proportion. His hair was dark and curly, with a receding hairline. He had a generous nose, limpid blue eyes, and a stern mien, though he was always polite and kind in manners. He wore a voluminous moustache and goatee, with his cheeks shaven.

Much of what made Norton's appearance so singular was his style of dress. Early in his reign, he wore cast-off Union and Confederate uniforms, as often mixing as matching, to show he was emperor of North and South alike. In time, he switched to a regular dark frock coat, with brass buttons, the shoulders of which were appended large fringed epaulets, and wore a battered old sword. All of these metal items were usually in need of polishing (Drury 12, Lane 225). His shoes were usually in a similar state, and his whole costume frequently became thin and shabby from wear. On such occasions, he was supplied with a new uniform at public expense, lest this living symbol of San Francisco make its citizens look mean and unconcerned (Lane 172).

For a hat, the Emperor wore a kepi, a kossuth (or slouch) hat, and, most famously, a tall beaver topper with a metal cockade and an enormous bunch of cock's feathers (Drury 85). In his lapel he usually wore a day-old carnation--the gift of an admiring florist (ibid. 92)--which he would often gallantly present to some little girl (Fitzgerald 74, Martin 63). He owned a collection of walking sticks, including the monstrous "serpent scepter," a gift from the esteeming residents of Portland, Oregon (Drury 132). In inclement weather, he would carry a tri-colored Chinese umbrella (Lane 224).

His lodgings were cheap. For most of his reign, he stayed at one boarding house for 50 cents a day ($9.50 today), which he insisted on paying each day, in cash. For this sum he got his own room, measuring nine by six feet, furnished with a bed and sofa (Drury 90-1, Lane 210-1). His imperial raiment hung from nails on a wall, which was also decorated with lithographs of the eligible female monarchs of his day, including Queen Victoria, Queen Emma of Hawaii, Empress Eugenie of France, and Empress Carlotta of Mexico, all of which he contemplated a strategic marriage with (Drury 91, 129; Lane 211-2).

San Francisco then had a curious institution, the free lunch counter. For the price of a drink, one could avail oneself of a board spread with chops, duck, and eggs (Drury 70, Lane 213). He was not unknown to take his lunch on the go: Methodist clergyman Oscar Fitzgerald once saw the Emperor remove a bologna sausage from his pocket, which he devoured greedily, assuming he would be unseen (Fitzgerald 75-6, Lane

255). It is unknown how often Norton bought a drink in exchange for his lunch, as he was known for his abstemious drinking habits, or whether he simply ate for free, as was his imperial due (Drury 71-2). He usually also rode the streetcars and trains for free (ibid. 174), and theater owners would reserve for him a balcony seat, gratis, at any debut (ibid. 150, Martin 68).

Though not a drinker, he evidently enjoyed tobacco. When still in business, he owned a cigar factory (Drury 35, Martin 17), and as emperor he would receive cigars as tokens of affection from admiring citizens. And a painting exists of Norton in mufti, smoking a well-colored meerschaum pipe (Lane 225, opposite), indicating he smoked it often.

How did the Emperor finance himself? Earlier in his reign, he would visit his former business associates and collect a monthly "tax" of 25 or 50 cents, which he carefully recorded in a register, and furnished a receipt (Drury 90). It is likely his Masonic brethren also contributed to his relief (Fitzgerald 73). As time wore on, any remaining successful businessmen from the Gold Rush years slowly cashed out and trickled back home in the east, diminishing Norton's "tax base" (Drury 66).

In time, his Majesty lighted on the idea of issuing bonds, which he sold, or gave in exchange for goods and services, accepted at face value (ibid. 140-1). The recipients of these notes kept them, treasured them as mementos, and now those that remain are now a much sought-after relic among numismatists and history buffs alike.

His daily habit was to meet his "court," consisting of fellow down-

at-the-heels Forty-Niners, at Portsmouth Square (ibid. 91-2), then read the papers at the Mechanics Institute, Mercantile Library, or Bohemian Club, all of which gladly admitted him as a non-dues-paying member (ibid. 149-50, Lane 214). After lunch, he would walk up and down the streets on one of his inspection tours, looking over sidewalks, boardwalks, streets, fireplugs, streetlamps (Lane 213-4), bicycles (Drury 162), and streetcars (ibid. 178). In the evenings, he might take in a lecture or play, for free.

Nor did he confine his activities to San Franciso. Norton would inspect military exercises at the Presidio, and in Oakland and Berkeley (ibid. 97); he would attend openings of the Legislature in Sacramento (ibid. 96, 186); he went visiting in Petaluma, Marysville, and Oroville (ibid. 98). In 1869, he was present at the opening of the western terminus of the Transcontinental Railroad in Oakland (ibid. 157). In 1876, when the Brazilian emperor Dom Pedro II visited San Francisco, the two monarchs of respectively vast empires were acquainted at a reception held for Dom Pedro in Berkeley. They later had a hour's pleasant conversation at the Brazilian monarch's suite at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco. If the brother monarchs' chat was overheard by servants, none were so disloyal and indiscreet to repeat it (ibid. 193).

How can we explain the extent to which Norton was humored--indeed, celebrated? As we shall discuss below, the Taoists would say it was his Te, his gravitas. He comported himself with great dignity and royal bearing, was benevolent, and his sincerity attracted cooperation from all

he met. As Confucius said of the legendary emperor Shun (trad. r. 22nd or 23rd centuries, B.C.), he merely seated himself in all rectitude, and all conformed themselves accordingly (Chan 43). Norton conformed himself to T'ien, great Heaven, the universal Deity, and so received its mandate. Whether t'ien-ming (the Mandate of Heaven) followed Te, or Te, t'ien-ming, is perhaps like asking after angels and pins. The reality was that people were fond of Norton, and gladly suffered his imperial pretense, the "the willing tribute of a free people" (Drury 3).

Treating him as an emperor made it so, for there is no ontological difference between Norton and a legal monarch, just human agreement to treat each as legitimate. In Shakespeare's Henry VI (Third part, Act III, sc. 1; mentioned in Martin, p. 27), the second gamekeeper confronts the fugitive, lately-deposed king, saying, "Ay, but thou talk'st as if thou wert a king." Henry replies, "Why, so I am, in mind; and that's enough." Norton was not only emperor in his own imagination, but in everyone else's, as well.

> My crown is in my heart, not on my head,
> Not deck'd with diamonds and Indian stones,
> Not to be seen; my crown is call'd content,
> A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy (ibid.).

## 2.6. Tolerant racial views.

The Emperor held, for his day, some very progressive views on the relations between the several races inhabiting the empire he ruled.

Though before the Civil War, he opposed the emancipation of the slaves, he did so because of the disorderliness by which it was being undertaken, not because he believed the slaves should not be free. Indeed, when he appointed the Pacific Appeal as his royal gazette from 1869, he chose what had been an abolitionist paper, and was then an a journal of advocate for the newly freed African-Americans (Drury 147). Further, its editor, Peter Anderson, was black. (Aside: Anderson was a friend of Mark Twain, who was himself an admirer of Emperor Norton.) Well ahead of his time, Norton decreed that African-Americans were to be allowed to ride the streetcars and attend public schools (Lumea para. 21).

Norton also took a kind attitude towards California's Chinese residents, who were then the subject of intense nativist prejudice. Already mentioned is the incident of the Emperor's intervention against an anti-Chinese riot (though difficult to corroborate; personal communication with Lumea). In his daily life, he spent most mornings in Portsmouth Square with other washed-up Forty-Niners, including one Ah How, who was regularly featured in the city's police blotters (Drury 127). Ah How reported to have met Norton at the jail when the Emperor was released after an arrest for lunacy in 1869. Possibly a racist jest at Norton's expense, the newspapers referred to Ah How as the Emperor's "chamberlain" (also dubbing his Portsmouth Square associates as his "court").

The Emperor's favorite umbrella--the gift from an admirer in Chinatown, one Wo Sing (Lane 82)--was of a three-colored (red, yellow, and

blue) Chinese sort, and was the one he was found carrying the rainy night he died (Drury 195-6). There are several photos of his Majesty that feature this umbrella.

Norton was frequently incensed by the treatment by whites of his Chinese subjects. When California passed a law making Chinese testimony inadmissible in court, Norton, in a decree published Feb. 24th, 1868, order the Supreme Court of the United States to issue an injunction against the law (the decree is apparently no longer extant). Eighteen months passed, and the Emperor grew imperious in his impatience, and he issued this sternly worded fiat:

> Whereas we, Norton I, Dei Gratia. Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, issued a Decree, commanding the United States Supreme Court to issue a peremptory mandamus, ordering all the Courts of Law and Justice within their jurisdiction to admit Chinese evidence, the same as that of any other Foreign Nation;
>
> Whereas we have not been officially informed that said order has been complied; and,
>
> Whereas our commercial relations and Treaty with that gigantic Nation is endangered by refusing this act of Justice and right;
>
> Now therefore, we do hereby and decree Chinese evidence admissible to prevent difficulty, and order the Supreme Court dissolved, if they fail to consent to this our Imperial Decree.
>
> Norton I.

Being, as they were, unafraid of dissolution, the Supreme Court obeyed this order in the same fashion as the former one--which is to say, not at all. In any event, the California Legislature repealed the offensive law in its 1871-2 session (Lane 258-9).

Two years later, further down the coast, white Angelenos rioted and

lynched fifteen Chinese (ibid. 257-8). His Majesty was livid at this injustice and disturbance of his imperial peace, and, righteous in his fury, commanded the immediate arrest of the evildoers:

> Whereas the outrage done upon the few defenceless Chinese at Los Angeles is likely to endanger the lives of foreigners, and our commercial relations with the large influential Chinese Empire;
>
> Now therefore we, Norton I, Dei Gratia, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, do hereby command the prompt and immediate arrest of all persons implicated in the said wrong, and that they be immediately incarcerated in prison, until they can be dealt with according to law.
>
> Norton I.

As infamous as the history of lynch mobs in the United States has been, the likelihood of any consequences being visited on the rioters is quite low. Nevertheless, Norton warned "the eyes of the Emperor will be upon anyone who shall counsel any outrage or wrong on the Chinese" (Lumea par. 21).

The Emperor extended his gracious generosity of spirit to other Pacific peoples as well, and even contemplated marriage with either queens of Tonga or Hawaii, and kept a lithograph of the latter on the wall of his "imperial chambers" (Drury 91, 129; Lane 211-2). When another, up--and-coming Pacific power's warship made a port call at San Francisco, Norton was anxious--aware of his city's occasional violent hostility towards East Asians--that the Japanese sailors that put ashore would not be harassed by any boorish whites. He decreed (Imperial Government proclamations index):

PROCLAMATION

Whereas a war vessel belonging to our friend the emperor of Japan is on a visit and is at present in our harbor;

And whereas, we are desirous of being courteous to strangers;

Now therefore we, Norton I, Dei gratia Emperor, do hereby command all persons to show the officers and crew every attention, so that commerce may be benefited thereby.

Norton I

Given under our royal hand and seal this 23d December, 1875.

For all his sympathy and solicitousness towards East Asians, however, Norton only had a glancing experience of Asian religions. If he was a Sage-king, he was probably unaware of it. Indeed, while he praised Confucius, he took a dim view towards a myriad puzzling rituals and propitiatory rites for a host of deities, "Ancients," "Immortals," ancestors, and ghosts, as found in the Chinese folk religions (tao-chiao and fa-chiao, respectively). Keep Confucianism, he suggested, but abandon all popular superstitions, as he saw them (Martin 45-6). Norton didn't care who the humbug belonged to, Chinese or otherwise; he was no less skeptical of Spiritualism, grown here at home in America (Lane 216; see below, 2.8, Religious proclivities).

Surprising for the day, perhaps, Norton's sense of justice extended as far as Native Americans, many of them caught then in the throes of the Indian Wars.

The conflict with the Modoc nation began in 1852, when the northern California tribe killed 65 whites, and whites retaliated by killing 41 Modocs (Martin 52-4). Two decades later, the war between the U.S. Army and the Modocs was at full tilt. In 1873, Norton offered, in the

Pacific Appeal, to mediate, ordering that

> Governor Booth...escort the Indian envoys to the scene of warfare, and if possible, induce the Chiefs to come to San Francisco and smoke the Calumet with the Emperor.

This offer was not taken up, at least on the white side, who doubtlessly did not bother to inform the Modocs of it having been made. But, Norton being Norton, the disorder and needless violence could be no further countenanced. To force a peace, he did "hereby command," in the Appeal, "the capture, as prisoners of war, of the Modoc Tribe, they be civilized from barbarism, and prohibit their being killed as unnecessary, except in extreme cases." Emphasis added, for as prisoners of war, they could not be abused or killed. By "extreme cases" he likely meant those resisting capture to the death, or that killed their jailers after capture. But it was his Majesty's will and pleasure that, ideally, no Native American be needlessly harmed.

Intelligent and reflective, Norton realized the source of Native American resistance was a very one-sided theft of native lands, destruction of their way of life, and continually being pushed into marginal land and kept in breathtaking poverty. He was aware of the long history of the United States' faithless treaties, broken as soon as they were made. He cut to the heart of the problem (Pacific Appeal, Apr. 26th, 1873):

> Whereas it is our intention to have publicly punished, before as many of the Indian chiefs as can be assembled together, of all the Indian agents and other parties connected with the frauds against the Indian tribes and the Government, in order to satisfy the Indians that in the future the American people

intend to act justly toward them.

It is difficult to appreciate how radical, indeed transgressive, was the demand that crimes by whites against the Nations be punished, and that they, white men, should be punished at the feet of red men.

Further east in the Dakotas, the U.S. Army was fighting the Sioux nations in a tedious back-and-forth that disturbed the Realm. Enough was enough, and Native Americans risked extermination if they continued in their resistance. Norton advised them to throw themselves upon his mercy, for he, at least, was just and forgiving, where the Army was cruel and relentless, and--once angered--liable to commit a genocide. He decreed (Imperial Government, no source given):

> Whereas Sitting Bull and the United States army have had their fun about long enough,
>
> Now therefore we, Norton I, Dei gratia Emperor, do hereby command the immediate return of Crook and Terry to headquarters, and Sitting Bull is commanded with his whole tribe to surrender to the Emperor, whose will is that justice is done, as otherwise, sooner or later, the death of himself and tribe is certain.
>
> Norton I.

Unfortunately, Sitting Bull only surrendered in 1881, when there was no emperor left to hear his case. He would be confined to the Standing Rock reservation in the Dakotas, and there assassinated by agents of the Indian Bureau in 1890.

In all the preceding, we see an emperor who was just and impartial toward all his subjects (if insisting they be modernize as he understood it), taking no sides, not only between parties or religions or economic classes, but even among the several races. He was emperor of them all,

equally. A century and a half later, the land he presumed to rule has yet to catch up.

2.7. Progressive edicts.

The Emperor did not merely limit himself to political pronouncements. Particularly in the latter half of his reign, Norton was very much preoccupied with practical matters, scientific innovation and even public health--a breadth of interest bordering on the polymathic.

Of these far-sighted fiats, Norton is most famous for his civil engineering proposals. He published a proclamation (now apparently lost) calling for the straightening of a winding Petaluma Creek, which, owing to its bends and turns, had silted up and was passable only by shallow-draft boats. Whether a result of Norton's prodding or not, it was soon (sometime after 1866) accomplished, and Petaluma's residents were happy to credit the Emperor, inaugurating his fond relationship with that city (Drury 150-2). To this day, the Army Corps of Engineers dredges the erstwhile creek, now a river, in a task that would not be possible but for having been straightened in the 19th century.

The civil engineering project for which the Emperor is best known is the Bay Bridge, which spans the Bay between Oakland and San Francisco (Drury 142-3, 156; Lane 189-92). The following decree appeared in the Oakland Daily News:

Whereas the Oaklanders are quite a well-behaved people,

> and may remain so if not brought in contact with the vicious and profane, and
>
> Whereas it is our purpose and desire that Oakland and San Francisco shall be neighborly, but view each other afar off;
>
> Now therefore we, Norton I, Dei Gratia Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, do order and direct the city engineers of both cities shall cause the space between Goat Island and Oakland to be filled in with dirt taken from Mount Diablo, and that suitable wharves for ocean steamers be erected along the front of the same; whereof fail not under our royal displeasure.
>
> Given under our hand this 13th day of August, A.D. 1869 in the City of San Francisco.

As any map will attest, Mt. Diablo remains impressively montane. Nevertheless, Oakland is now a major deep-water port, with wharves and massive derricks, and the site of the Oakland International Airport. Norton had clearly seen promise in the East Bay town. His concern that the two cities should "view each other afar off" stems from public suggestions the cities be merged with the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad, which had its terminus in Oakland (Drury 142).

Another such proclamation appeared in the same paper five days later. It would become his most celebrated:

> Whereas reliable information has reached us to the effect that our neighboring sovereign, the reigning Queen of the Friendly islands, is desirous of annexing her dominions to the United States, and herself to our royal person,
>
> Whereas it is our pleasure to acquiesce in all means of civilization and population:
>
> Now therefore we, Norton I, <u>Dei Gratia</u> Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, do order and direct first, that Oakland shall be the coast termination of the Central Pacific Railroad; secondly, that a suspension bridge be constructed from the improvements lately ordered by our royal decree at Oakland Point to Yerba Buena, from thence to the mountain range of Sacilleto (Sausalito), and from thence to the Farallones, to be of sufficient strength and size for a railroad; and thirdy, the Central Pacific Railroad Company are

> charged with the carrying out of this work, for purposes that will hereafter appear.
>
> Whereof fail not under pain of death.
>
> Given under our hand this 18th day of August, A.D. 1869.

The penalties of displeasure and death are uncharacteristic of the Emperor's prose, so there is some question of authenticity. It is not impossible, however, that the nucleus of the proclamations are real, but were tampered with by an editor "punching up" his copy (ibid. 145). The idea of a bridge to the Farallones is patently absurd. Such editorial tampering may have induced Norton to choose the Pacific Appeal as his "royal gazette." This appeared in the same on Mar. 23rd, 1872:

> The following is decreed and ordered to be carried into execution as soon as convenient:
>
> I. That a suspension bridge be built from Oakland Point to Goat Island, and then to Telegraph Hill; provided such bridge can be built without injury to the navigable waters of the Bay of San Francisco.
>
> II. That the Central Pacific Railroad Company be granted franchises to lay down tracks and run cars from Telegraph Hill and along the city front to Mission Bay.
>
> III. That all deeds by the Washington Government since the establishment of our Empire are hereby decreed null and void unless our Imperial signature is first obtained thereto.

Authorities were slow to obey; indeed, they would delay another 60 years, but Norton was determined his imperial will be respected and the project researched and carried out. Six months later, in the same paper, he again decreed:

> Whereas we issued our decree ordering the citizens of San Francisco and Oakland to appropriate funds for the survey of a suspension bridge from Oakland Point via Goat Island; also for a tunnel; and to ascertain which is the best project; and
>
> Whereas the said citizens have hitherto neglected to notice our said decree; and

> Whereas we are determined our authority shall be fully respected;
>
> Now therefore we do hereby command the arrest by the army of both the Boards of City Fathers if they persist in neglecting our decrees.
>
> Given under our royal hand and seal at San Francisco, this 17th day of September, 1872.

Ultimately the "San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge," as it is officially named, would be built in 1933. A plaque was placed there by the fraternal order E Clampus Vitus in 1939 (Drury 211; he mistakenly misread the plaque as dating to 1959), commemorating the Norton's far-sightedness. Today, the non-profit Emperor's Bridge Campaign exists to lobby for the renaming of the bridge for Emperor Norton.

As for the tunnel (mention of which is oddly missing from earlier decrees), the Transbay Tube, an underwater railway tunnel, opened in 1974, more than a century after Norton decreed it be built. The Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Authority plans to dig a second tunnel to increase capacity (Hernandez, Lauren, "A second transbay tube for BART? It could happen", San Francisco Chronicle, Nov. 14th, 2018). If not the Bay Bridge, then the Emperor's advocates would probably relish either tunnel (or both) being renamed for him.

California is a land made possible by mechanized transportation, and Norton took a keen interest in developments in that field, not merely in railroads or wharves, but in the conveyances themselves. In 1869, Fred Marriott and Andrew Hallidie demonstrated their "Avitor," an early attempt at a (steam-powered) dirigible (Drury 153-4, Lane 185). It was a modest success, but no investors stepped forward. Norton himself stepped

in:

> Whereas we, Norton I, Dei Gratia Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, being anxious for the future fame and honor of the residents of San Francisco,
>
> Do hereby command all our good and loyal subjects to furnish the means and exert their best skill and advance money to make Mr. Marriot's aerial machine a success.
>
> Given at San Francisco, Cal., this 25th day of July, A.D. 1869, in the seventeenth year of our reign.

(Neither Drury nor Lane cite which paper ran this, but it may have been the Pacific Appeal, based on the date. A curiosity is that 1869 is the "seventeenth year of our reign" (Drury 154). This would be 1852, not 1859, when Norton published his first proclamation declaring the Empire. The reader will recall, discussed above, that an acquaintance recalled Norton as saying, in 1852, "If I were emperor of the United States, you would see a great many changes effected.")

In any event, it was not to be. "Mr. Marriott's flying machine," being filled with hydrogen, went down in flames before a second demonstration could take place.

The iconic cable car, so emblematic of San Francisco, was introduced in May, 1872, by the aforementioned inventor, Andrew Hallidie (Pacific Appeal? Drury 178-9). Norton thought it unsafe and in need of improvement:

> Whereas we are informed that the screw which works the Clay Street Railroad is not strong enough for that purpose, and that it is, consequently, dangerous to the lives of the passengers; also that the dummy is a useless appendage.
>
> Now therefore, the Directors of the company are hereby ordered to see that precautions are taken to make travel on said railroad perfectly safe by using a screw with at least twenty-four inches diameter.

The Emperor was right, too: the engine, or "dummy" car, would be merged into the passenger car, and the braking screw replaced by a sort of levered grip, now in use in streetcars the world over.

Possessed of a fertile mind and imagination, and having occasion ride the rails around the Bay and east to Sacramento, he observed the manual switching of tracks--requiring a switchman with a reliable watch--and thought it could be done better and automatically (Drury 155-7). In 1869, the Emperor's solution was heralded by the Mining and Scientific Press:

> Emperor Norton has invented a Railroad Switch, a model of which is now being made. It consists of a novel application of a spiral or elliptical spring, operated by the weight of the passing train, by which the Switch is turned off or on as desired. Patent applied for.

(As of Aug. 22nd, 2019, The U.S. Patent Office's database of applications is only searchable prior to 1976 by the exact patent numbers. Such a number for Norton's patent application has not turned up in our research.)

The foregoing was reprinted in the Pacific Appeal, to which Norton added the following to indicate his imperial pleasure:

> The Emperor desires that there should be a thoroughly practical and mechanical Switch, and his ideas improved upon so that Europe will be glad to pay America for the patent.

There would be a fly in the Emperor's ointment. He desired that Hallidie make him a working model of his design, but Hallidie told his Majesty it would take $100. Norton, used to presenting checks for 25 or

50 cents to local banks, which usually humored him, tried to cash such a check with the First National Bank for $100. This was more than they were willing to part with for the sake of a joke, and they refused the check. Norton was incensed by this injury to his dignity (and financial prospects), a lack of civic concern, and its short-sightedness. He fired off the following cannonade in the Pacific Appeal:

> Whereas the First National Bank refused to honor a small check of $100, to pay the value of a model for a Railway Switch invented by us, thereby endangering our private personal interest to a large estate:
>
> And whereas it is publicly notorious that one or two of the Directors have large amounts in trust belonging to our personal estate;
>
> Now therefor we, Norton I, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, do hereby decree the confiscation to the State of all interest of said Bank as security for any losses we may sustain by reason of their acts.

His conceit of a large sum owed him aside, a confiscation never occurred, a model was never made, and no patent granted. One wonders what uses Norton would have put his invention proceeds to, had he gotten his model and patent.

The Emperor, calling San Francisco his chosen capital, the "Queen of the Pacific," was very concerned with issues of public health and safety, spending much of his daily perambulations in the inspection of sidewalks, hydrants, and policemen. When, in 1868, there was an outbreak of smallpox in the city, Norton lent his pen to the public health response:

> Norton I, Dei Gratia, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, being anxious that the physicians should continue unabated in their zeal for the total obliteration of the smallpox: do hereby command the city authorities of all places where the disease has been, or may be, to continue to make

> suitable compensation in honor, or money, to all who have or may make the most effective cures of cases of smallpox.

(Lane 179-80; he does not indicate in which paper this was published.)

But as important to as city as public health is, so too is its civic pride. From its beginning, San Francisco has been plagued with the appellation--worse than the scourge of smallpox--of "'Frisco," which today no local resident would willingly utter. In one of his more celebrated proclamations (Drury 176-7), Norton rubbed the tarnish from the crown of his "Queen," and threatened the thing about which people care most--their purses:

> Whoever after due and proper warning shall be heard to utter the abominable word "Frisco," which has no linguistic or other warrant, shall be deemed guilty of a High Misdemeanor, and shall pay into the Imperial Treasury as penalty the sum of twenty-five dollars.

As with the switch patent, had Norton been able to enforce this decree, he would have been made richer than Croesus, and every San Franciscan to stand an inch taller.

## 2.8. Religious proclivities.

As has been been hinted at above, Norton rejected his Jewish birth and fancied himself secretly a Bourbon, only entrusted to John and Sarah Norton for his safety. A Bourbon king, Louis XVIII, reigned in France when Norton was born in 1818, so why this cloak and dagger was necessary,

or why he thought it was, remains a mystery.

Nathan Peiser, an acquaintance from South Africa, recalled that Norton didn't care for John's observances, and once angered him by laughing through sabbath prayers (Drury 10-3, 88). His Majesty would seem upon reflection to have felt bad about this adolescent behavior, and remained embarrassed, for nearly the first thing out of his mouth upon meeting Peiser again in San Francisco in 1865, was a recollection of the incident.

Whence came his rejection of Judaism can only be speculated at. He may actually have been a Bourbon scion (unlikely), or sincerely believed himself so to be (more likely), and was merely insisting upon the factual. He did not seem to be an anti-Semite, but he may have internalized some of the prejudices of his day, and was embarrassed to be a Jew. It may also have been a natural defense against antisemitism, which then as today can attract prejudice, ostracism, even violence. (Norton's Jewish origins were publicly known in San Francisco by 1876 at least; Lloyd 130). But perhaps it just didn't fit with the story he was telling. There are no Jewish monarchs, and no one without a noble lineage could be an emperor. Or, perhaps, it was simple boyhood rebellion against a strict or disapproving father, which in time ossified. There is no end to the possibilities, or combinations thereof.

In any event, his Bourbon conceits did not prevent him from occasionally attending synagogue as emperor (Drury 88), and, in 1862, after ascending the throne, condescended to involve the city's Jewish leader-

ship in his coronation plans:

> We do hereby command the Leaders of the Hebrew, Catholic and Protestant Churches to sanctify and have us crowned Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico.
>
> Given under our hand and Seal of State this 10th day of July, 1862.

(Drury does not indicate which paper ran this proclamation.)

The rabbis were no more cooperative than the priests and ministers, but no less cooperative, either.

In 1870, San Francisco passed a Sunday law, which closed businesses on the Christian sabbath (Drury 161). Jews would be forced to either break their own sabbath, or else have one less day a week than their Christian neighbors with which to conduct their business. The Emperor saw the injustice of it and came to the defense of his Jewish subjects:

> Whereas it is our intention to endeavor to obtain some alteration in the doctrine of the Church, by which the Hebrew and Christian faiths will become united; as also by which the foreign churches will become Americanized;
>
> Now therefore we, Norton I, Emperor (etc.), do hereby prohibit the enforcement of the Sunday Law until our object is obtained and one Sunday established.

(Drury does not indicate where this proclamation was published.)

Apart from perhaps acquitting him of antisemitism, this hints at the Emperor's inclination towards the development of a universal doctrine and religion. This attitude may have induced him, in his business days, to become a Freemason, or perhaps it was the consequence thereof. Though not a religion, Freemasonry points to a "Grand Architect of the Universe" that transcends sectarian boundaries and proclaims all believers to be

brothers and equals (at least, in the lodge). Norton was a founding member (number 57) of Occidental Lodge #22 in 1852, and even after suspending him for non-payment of dues, his brethren would contribute to his upkeep after his business foundered, even providing his burial plot when he died (ibid. 35, 44, 66, 200).

As emperor, Norton attended all (Abrahamic) religious congregations in the city, out of a desire to betray no partiality among the sects. "I think it my duty to encourage religion and morality by showing myself at church," Norton told the Reverend Mr. Fitzgerald (74-5), "and to avoid jealousy I attend them all in turn." (Norton also despised what he called "political preaching," and told Fitzgerald that if ministers did not desist in making a soap box out of pulpits, he would consolidate them into a single state church where, presumably, he could control the topics of sermons.)

Norton put in appearances at synagogue services, staying for the music but departing before the sermon (Drury 87-8). He attended Catholic and the various Protestant churches, but seemed to like Unitarian services best (ibid. 160). Norton had a measured and liberal spirit, and made a fetish of reason, so perhaps it is this church that most appealed to his religious values.

In 1872, the Emperor published in the Appeal a lengthy proclamation (Drury 161-2)--evidently in response to some recent article or lecture--which clearly shows his impulse towards reason, reform, and universalization in religion, but also hints at a Christian self-identification:

> Whereas there are great commotions in different quart,ers of the terrestrial globe, arising from discussing the question, "The Purification of the Bible--its True and False Lights," and fears are entertained that a war may break out at some remote point and spread all over the world, carrying in its winding course death, pestilence, famine, devastation and ruin;
>
> Whereas such a state of affairs is to be deplored by all liberal-minded Christians, who oppose bigotry, charlatanism, and humbuggery, and who follow the golden maxim of the lamented Lincoln, "With malice toward none--with charity for all";
>
> And whereas Religion is like a beautiful garden, wherein the False Lights may be compared to the poppies, which fall to the ground, decay and are no more, the True Lights bloom in everlasting etherealism, blessing forever the Creator and the Christian world by their Love and Truth;
>
> Now therefore we, Norton I, (etc.), do hereby command that all communities select delegates to a Bible Convention, to be held in the City of San Francisco, State of California, U.S.A., on the second day of January, 1873, for the purpose of eliminating all doubtful passages contained in the present printed edition of the Bible, and that measures be (adopted) towards the obliteration of all religious sects and the establishment of an Universal Religion.

"Blessing forever the Creator and the Christian world": another, proclamatory bit of evidence that the Emperor considered himself a Christian monarch. And this: when his dynastic enemy Napoleon III was defeated at the Battle of Sedan in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War, Norton found it an occasion for public rejoicing:

> We, Norton I, Emperor of the United States of America and Protector of Mexico, do hereby decree and ordain that for the period of one week from and after the date hereof and beginning forthwith, the people shall indulge in continuous rejoicings and most fervent prayers of thanksgiving, for that the God of Hosts, in His Majesty and Wisdom, has lent great prowess to the arms of our friends and blood-cousins the Prussians and led them to immortal victory for the greater glory of God and the Universal Brotherhood of Man. In hoc signo vinces.

This last line is significant. "By this sign shalt thou conquer."

At the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312, A.D., the Roman emperor Constantine the Great had a vision wherein he heard this portent, and in the sky he saw writ the Chi Rho, a symbol of Christ. Hardly a sentiment that a Jew could endorse.

(Incidentally, "In hoc signo vinces" is the motto of the Masonic Knights Templar, but there is no evidence that Norton joined this appendant body of Masons. If it had, it would be confirmation Norton was a Christian as while any male believer can be a Freemason, only Christians may join the Templars. We wrote the San Francisco Templar Consistory to see if their member rolls listed a Joshua Norton, but sadly their records did not survive the earthquake of 1906 and subsequent fires that swept through the city.)

Then there is the incident, mentioned above, of Norton using the Lord's Prayer to shame a lynch mob into dispersing. The Morning Call reported that an eastern publication had printed the Emperor's understanding of the Christian religion (Lane 215; he does not include the actual article), saying it "had (an) advantage over many pretentious theological explanations, (in) that it contained no unchristian sentiments," such as a lack of tolerance or charity.

San Francisco's Jews evidently accepted Norton's apostasy from his parents' faith, for they stayed away from his funeral in 1880 (and re-interment in 1934), possibly out of embarrassment--they could not have thought him a credit to their tribe. His funeral would be presided over by an Episcopal priest, serenaded to his reward by Christian hymns, and

buried in a Masonic cemetery (ibid. 10; Lane 273-4).

(We inquired with the present rector of the Church of the Advent as to whether the parish register from that time was still extant, which would have given some additional details about Norton's funeral--specifically to confirm that it was the Christian burial office, not the one reserved for non-believers--but his registers from before 1906 do not survive.)

Though he had attended Spiritualist gatherings as part of his circuit between the various churches, Norton quickly came to view it as pure humbug (Lane 216). In February, 1860, he issued the following stern injuction:

> Whereas there are undoubtedly lying and deceitful spirits as well as truthful ones; and
>
> Whereas through the instrumentality of those who are enlightening others on this matter, the inmates of our Insane Asylums throughout the several provinces in our Empire have become greatly increased in number;
>
> Now therefore, to prevent, so far as possible, the increase of insanity throughout our Dominions, we do hereby Order and Direct that all preachers of Spiritualism, without distinction, shall be sent to our Insane Asylums, and there kept on short allowance until their minds can cool down from heavenly to earthly subjects.
>
> Norton I.

This, coming from a supposed madman! But the Emperor had a scientific and materialist mind--if occasionally philosophical--and ghosts, the fodder of Spiritualism, were too much for him to give serious consideration. In 1871, a widow named Mrs. Jorgensen thought she saw her late husband's ghostly visage etched in her attic window (ibid. 182-3). Soon her claims attracted the attentions of the public. Norton thought it so

much rubbish, and, hoping to save fevered minds from committal to "our Insane Asylums," he issued a firm and final ruling on Mrs. Jorgensen's ghost window, laying the matter to rest for his loyal subjects:

> Imperial Chambers,
> December 11th, 1871.
>
> Be it declared--that I, in the interest of sound faith and the progress of scientific research, have caused a strict and careful investigation to be made concerning the sensational rumors afloat in the city, and I find there is no reason to believe in any supernatural agencies at work among us.
>
> The figure on the window is the correct image of some man, evidently of foreign birth. While looking out the window while the glass was under some peculiar circumstances, and at a time when his stomach was disordered either by indigestion or intoxication, the acidity of his breath has caused his image on the glass to have been permanently impressed.
>
> Norton I.

Religion held an intense interest for Norton, even while he was skeptical of certain beliefs and practices. Whatever his fondness for it generally, it was to be subordinate to his ideas of reason and progress, rational, and free of all sensation and superstitious nonsense.

2.9. The Emperor's sanity.

An event that neatly divides Norton's reign into two parts was his arrest, on Jan. 21st, 1867, "for involuntary treatment of a mental disorder" (Drury 124-8). Before then, he struggled for recognition and was underfed; after, he became as much of an icon of the city as the Golden Gate Bridge would be later, and he would never skip a meal again. Outrage over his arrest saw to it, and galvanized the public's affection for

him.

Armand Barbier, an auxiliary policeman, seized upon the imperial Person and frog-marched his Majesty "downtown" for booking. The original charge was for vagrancy, but Norton could show he had an address and was carrying $4.75 (about $80 today) in coin. Frustrated, Barbier changed the charge to "lunacy," and Norton was held pending examination by the Commissioner of Lunacy. "Our Insane Asylums" loomed near.

But the press soon found out and howled. After all, Norton's amusing inked their presses while buttering their bread. Fitz Smythe of the the Daily Alta wrote indignantly, "Norton in his day was a respectable merchant, and since he has worn the Imperial purple has shed no blood, robbed nobody, and despoiled the country of no one, which is more than can be said of his fellows in that line."

George Fitch of the Evening Bulletin--to whom Norton had given his first proclamation in 1859--denounced the charge of lunacy as "ludicrous," and called for a reconstituted Vigilance Committee to attend the Commissioner's hearing. "This blot on the record of San Francisco," he fumed, "must be removed."

For a police chief hoping to improve public opinion of his department, Norton's arrest was a publicity nightmare. He ordered the Emperor released at once. Albert Evans of the Daily Alta reported that his Majesty was released into the care of his "royal courtiers," the Forty-Niners of his mornings in Portsmouth Square, and his "grand chamberlain" Ah How witnessed the receipt returning Norton's personal effects. Norton

stepped outside to be greeted by an applauding throng of well-wishers. From now on, the police would salute the Emperor whenever he passed by (ibid. 127-8).

But was the Emperor mad? What sort of man adopts for himself the loftiest title there is, publishes commanding decrees, and wanders the streets in a shabby military uniform? While the public did not want Norton in an asylum, it was generally assumed he was at least a little "touched" by some disorder of the mind.

Norton was not unaware of public opinion. Nathan Peiser, Norton's friend from his youth in South Africa, told Norton that he thought him mad (ibid. 20, Lane 210), to which Norton replied, "And so do many others".

It was nevertheless observed that Norton spoke elegantly and intelligently, frequented reading rooms, was well-versed in diverse disciplines, and even played a expert games of chess. "He was an expert at the game," Lane (214) says, "and could beat most opponents." Lloyd (133) writes, "He is more familiar with history than the ordinary citizen, and his scientific knowledge, though sometimes 'mixed,' is considerable." And: "He will talk readily on any subject, and his opinions are usually very correct, except when relating to himself."

Of course, one may be quite intelligent while also being madder than the proverbial hatter. Given Norton's later accounts of his secret Bourbon, Catholic birth, Drury believes Norton to have been schizophrenic (15-9, 72), and points to Norton's derision of his father religious ob-

servances. Noting that the disorder first manifests in adolescence, he concludes this disruption of his father's prayer service with inappropriate laughter was proof-positive of an incipient schizophrenia.

Of course, Drury is a journalist, not a psychiatrist. Schizophrenia is marked chiefly by disorganized, incoherent thinking, and hallucinatory disturbances, from which there is no evidence Norton suffered. Further, left untreated, schizophrenics do not tend to be very functional individuals, and Norton was a successful businessman in his adulthood. As emperor, he kept a regular schedule and seemed quite resourceful in navigating his poverty. Unlike many washed-up Forty-Niners, Norton was quite temperate and did not medicate with alcohol (ibid. 71-2, Lane 223), as many untreated schizophrenics do.

One psychiatrist has attempted a forensic diagnosis. Dr. Eric Lis, in the journal Academic Psychiatry (vol. 38 (1995), 181-5), failed to find conclusive evidence, or even strong suggestion, of a diagnosable disorder under the criteria set forth by the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. He notes that a delusion is not evidence of insanity, and that many otherwise sane people labor under delusions without a diagnostic co-morbidity (current politics aside). Perhaps further evidence of Norton's sanity is the pathologist's report after the Emperor's death. He found no structural abnormalities, no telling lesions, in Norton's brain, and that it was even slightly larger than average, by 1-1/2 ounces (Drury 198).

In the present author's opinion--for what such a thing is worth; it

is no less informed than Drury's--Norton was a romantic, a playful and fanciful soul making the best of a bad situation. Rather than being delusional, he may have deliberately and rationally chose the reality, the self-biography, that best suited his fancy. "Travel documentarian Timothy 'Speed' Levitch puts it this way: 'Some say he'd gone mad; others say he'd gone wise" (Lumea, par. 20). And, if one is judged by one's comportment, Norton carried himself like an emperor, was he not necessarily such?

Isobel Field, nee Osbourne, the step-daughter of Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson, met the Emperor in her childhood (Drury 5), and came to much the same conclusion. Writing in her memoirs,

> (Norton) was a gentle, kindly man, and fortunately found himself in the friendliest, most sentimental city in the world, the idea being "let him be emperor if he wants to." San Francisco played the game with him. (Emphasis added.)

2.10. Death, and legacy.

The Emperor Norton departed this life on Jan. 8th, 1880, just shy of his 62nd birthday. Climbing the steepest street in San Francisco, on his way to a lecture, Norton suddenly collapsed at the corner of California and Dupont Streets, dropping his Chinese umbrella (ibid. 195-6). The clock of St. Mary's Cathedral, just across the way, bore the legend, "Observe the time and fly away from evil" (Gazis-Sax par. 14).

His collapse was noticed immediately, a coach was summoned, and a

concerned crowd gathered. The Emperor was likely dead before being placed in the cab (Lane 269-70).

The following day, Norton was examined by a pathologist. In his pockets were a small gold piece, three dollars in silver, and a French franc of the year 1828, bearing the image of his nominal cousin, King Charles X; also present were a stack of unsigned, unissued imperial bonds, and several telegrams purporting to be from various European heads of state.

Why the Emperor was subjected to the indignity of an autopsy--a dissection, really--is unknown. The examiner, Dr. Douglass, declared he had died of "sanguinous apoplexy," what we today would call a cerebral hemorrhage, a fatal stroke. This finding was perhaps incidental; what the pathologist was really interested in was seeing whether there were any abnormalities in Norton's brain, to confirm he was mad. There were none. The brain, indeed, weighed more than average (Drury 198, Lane 272).

Norton was stitched up and his dignity restored. He was dressed in a black crepe gown and his brow imperially wreathed in laurel. The day after, on the 10th, 10,000 people (out of a population of 250,000--about one in 25 San Franciscans) waited hours to file past his body laid out at the morgue. Soon he was nearly buried in flowers. When the time came to actually bury him, many hundreds accompanied the body to the Masonic cemetery. There, an Episcopal priest, the Revd. William Githens of the Church of the Advent, said the Christian burial office, and a boy's choir sang "Nearer my God to thee" (Drury 10, Lane 273-4).

Nowhere was to be seen any representation from San Francisco's Jewish community to see off this apostate to his reward (Drury 202-4). But perhaps they were, in their absence, respecting the story he had made for himself, of a clandestine Bourbon (and Catholic) birth, or to cause him no embarrassment over the Jewishness he rejected. Whatever the case, it is likely to forever remain a mystery.

The newspapers, of course, deprived of their favorite, most lucrative correspondent as they now were, published florid, fawning eulogies of the Emperor. Not only in San Francisco, by throughout the country. The Cincinnati Enquirer wept these inky tears:

> Laid Low
>
> Emperor Norton gives up the ghost and surrendered his scepter to the man on the pale horse. The city by the Golden Gate mourns her illustrious dead. An emperor without enemies, a king without a kingdom, gone to kingdom come. Supported in life by the willing tribute of a free people, he drops dead at a street corner and now knows what lies beyond. (Emphasis added.)

Norton's fame had somewhat grown, apparently, and was no longer confined to the San Francisco Bay area only.

His funeral in 1880 would not be his last. San Francisco, then as now, strained at its seams and needed land for new development. The city's cemeteries were excavated in 1934, and his remains, at least, were relocated to the city of Colma, further down the peninsula, where the dead now vastly outnumber the living. This funeral, though less well attended by an adoring public, was held with greater pomp. The San Francisco municipal band played funeral marches, and a bugler played the last

post as soldiers from the 159th Infantry fired a 21-gun salute--the number of guns reserved for heads of state (albeit usually with cannons, not small arms). A new, massive granite tombstone was placed on the grave, declaring it the tomb of the Emperor of the United States, without quotation marks (ibid. 203, Lane 277).

The Emperor Norton remains a popular figure in San Francisco, and California generally--though much less so in the east--for his civic pride, farsightedness, and living life on his own terms, so typical of the California spirit. Today a visitor to the Misty City may view murals depicting the Emperor, as well as other San Francisco legends, including Mark Twain, and admirer of his Majesty in life, and whose character the King in Huckleberry Finn was based on Norton (Drury 217-8). The visitor may buy Emperor Norton cigars, Emperor Norton chocolates, Emperor Norton ale (Drury xii, Martin 88-9). One may even cross the Bay aboard the Harbor Emperor, which sports a Norton effigy from its prow. If only the penurious monarch were alive still to receive the royalties, every pun intended.

Whether Norton's decrees actually in any way caused the Bay Bridge and Transbay Tube to be built, the Old West fraternal organization E Clampus Vitus in 1939 attempted to place a plaque at the foot of the Bay Bridge, enjoining the passing traveler to "pause...and be grateful" to the Emperor, "whose prophetic wisdom conceived and decreed" the bridge (Drury 211-2, Martin 91). (It now resides in the Cliff House restaurant at Lands End.) Today, there is are perennial campaigns and petitions and

resolutions to rename these pieces of infrastructure for Emperor Norton.

And his nonconformity has made him a hero of latter-day fellow misfits, including the joke religion (or religious joke) of the Discordians, who hold Norton to be a saint, and whose holy book, the Principia Discordia (p. 43), urges the reader to "live like him!" (Martin 106).

And he is an unlikely hero to the drag community of San Francisco. In 1961, Jose Julio Sarria became the first openly gay political candidate in the United States, and in 1964 assumed for himself the title of Empress Jose, the Widow Norton, and went about in Victorian mourning garb. He purchased the plot at the Emperor's feet in Colma (ibid. 95) and was buried there in 2013, as the Widow Norton. What the Emperor would have thought of this connection can only be guessed at, but one hopes some small part of him would nevertheless be flattered.

3.0. Comparison of Norton to the Taoist Sage-king.

3.1. Summarium in cursus.

We have just laid out the strange life and career of Joshua Norton, the self-proclaimed Emperor of the United States, and before then we discussed ancient Chinese history and Taoist philosophical thought, where we examined the concept of the Sage-king (shung wang, 聖王 ). The challenge that remains to us is to compare and contrast Taoist philosophical principles with the biography of Emperor Norton, to discern whether and to what degree this eccentric monarch resembled the Sage-king of ancient Chinese philosophy.

To remind ourselves, the Sage-king is chun-tzu ( 君子 ), the "Superior man," who is adjudged to be so owing, chiefly and foremost, to his naturalness (tzu-jan, 自然 ), his pristine, primitive human nature, unspoiled by the corrupting influences of civilization. This is the first virtue, above all else, upon which all other Taoist virtues depend. To the Taoist, as with Rousseau or Voltaire, human nature is inherently good, and spoiled by artifice and worldly gain. This stands in contradistinction to the Western, Judeo-Christian worldview wherein humans are inherently wicked, and rectified only by laws and manners. The "Superior man" who embraces his naturalness and shuns all guile will necessarily possess spontaneity, acting without cunning or duplicity. Indeed, the word for "spontaneity" in Chinese, tzu-jan, is the same as that for naturalness.

It follows, therefore, that the Superior man is content with what he has, and seeks only sufficiency. To pursue more than this would lead one along the path of material gain and social ambition. This mode of living may appear to us to be a state of poverty, but this is rather the state of sufficiency and contentment, and not always seeking after more and more. And so, the Superior man accounts loss as gain (cf. Phil. 3:7-8).

To be content, one must be moderate. If one is prone to excess and gluttony, one's sense of self-sufficiency will be injured. The Superior man is sober in all senses, both eschewing intoxication and well as frivolity. He may not be overly serious of manner (or overly anything, if he is moderate), but is serious in his purposes and all he undertakes.

The Superior man, or Sage, is aloof. His manner of living sets him apart from others, and rejecting their manners and values sets him apart still more. He is friend to no faction or party in particular, so no one seeks his favor. He is supremely impartial, preferring no one to truth, and no group's interest over another. He resists playing one against the other for gain, and so makes for the perfect judge.

The Superior man possesses jen (仁), variously translated as humanity or benevolence. The Sage wants the best for for all, and wishes no one ill. This may be seen as an extension of his impartiality--he is partial to no one, and therefore partial to everyone. As such, he does not take cult, clan, or country too seriously, and because he is friend to all, he is a citizen of the world.

The foregoing are individual characteristics and personal virtues of

the Sage. However, the chief trait of the Superior man is not a trait at all, but an action--specifically non-action, or wu-wei (無爲).

Wu-wei translates variously as "non-action" (not acting), acting without action, creative non-action, and so forth. The Sage does not act with an object in mind, does not strive, and does not force a particular outcome. He allows events to unfold organically, so even in not doing, everything gets done in its own time. As Sage-king, the Superior man does not rule through coercion, and does not work in order to get credit or praise. Rather, he is humble, selfless, receptive, supple, yielding. Far from being willful, he "goes with the flow (Tao)" and bends with the breeze.

Practicing tzu-jan and wu-wei, the Sage is possessed of Te (德), "virtue" or "power." This is his gravitas, his charisma, his animal attraction. As Sage-king, the reason he can rule without effort or coercion is because people naturally follow his wisdom. And because he takes no credit, often the people credit themselves, believing the idea was theirs all along. Te is both a product of wu-wei and what allows wu-wei to work.

How does the Superior man, in the position of Sage-king, rule with sagacity? Much of what makes a king a sage is found in his personality and attitude, and he merely acts (or non-acts) in accord with his nature. Master Lao nevertheless offers practical advice for the novice ruler. The Sage-king rules so lightly, he almost does nothing at all, and the people believe they govern themselves. He does not rule by laws, but

from his Te, and rare, reluctant, surgical action.

The ideal country for the Sage-king to rule is a small one. He desires to keep the people simple--if not of mind, then of desires. He regards learning as the beginning of artifice and schemes and ambitions. The small state, in view of cultivating the people's simplicity, is most manageable.

Now, having reviewed the concept of the Sage-king as conceived by the Taoists, we turn to our thesis proper: To what extent does Emperor Norton resemble the Taoist Sage-king?

## 3.2. Personal qualities.

### 3.2.1. Naturalness.

Naturalness is a return to authentic, primitive human nature. A person possessed of this naturalness acts without calculation, guile, or pretense, and therefore is spontaneous. Unfortunately, this does not describe Joshua Norton. Throughout his life, we see Norton planning and plotting. This is absolutely de rigeur for running a business, at which Norton excelled. (Indeed, his failure as a young man in South Africa may been due to a lack of strategy.) A business professional needs to sniff out new ideas, new opportunities, anticipate competitors' moves and weaknesses, cultivate relationships with customers and influential people, and so forth.

Lin Yu-tang (4), contrasting Taoism with Confucianism, writes, "Con-

fucian philosophy is a philosophy of social order, and order is seldom exciting... Confucians worship culture and reason; Taoists reject them in favor of nature and intuition." There are few activities quite as complicated as running a business, except for government, which Norton entered (in theory, anyway) when he walked into the offices of the Daily Bulletin and published a proclamation declaring himself emperor.

Norton did not do this on a lark. Seven years prior, he had been heard to say, "If I were Emperor..." He had been deliberating the idea for years, so this action cannot be said to be very spontaneous, and what is not spontaneous cannot be said to be natural in a Taoist sense.

We can say, however, in the Emperor's defense that his nature was monarchical, and he was merely living out his nature as an emperor, regardless of the lot life had handed him. So while we cannot call him spontaneous, and therefore not natural (both in the sense of tzu-jan), we may say he possessed a naturalness in a qualified sense, in conforming his outward dignity to the dignity of his heart, his authentic imperial nature.

### 3.2.2. Contentment.

The way (Tao) of the Superior man is first to nurture a sense of contentment. It is through seeking and striving that he falls into the blind corners and dead ends of the rat race, and so sacrifices his naturalness (spontaneity). "Temper your senses, cultivate restraint, and you

will enjoy a life of peace" (52, Benjamin, hereafter abbreviated as Benj.; all chapter citations belong to chapters of the Tao Te Ching, followed by translator's name). The senses are the gateway to the anti-Tao of materialism:

> Too much light blinds the eye,
> Too much sound deafens the ear,
> Too much spice blunts the (palate),
> Too much desire maddens the mind, (12, Benj.)
> Rare, valuable goods keep their owners awake at night
> (ibid., Lin).

On this latter point, in chapter nine, Lao-tzu reminds us that "gold and jade" are not secure--they do not lead to lasting satisfaction, the whims of fate may take them away, "thieves (may) break through and steal (Mt. 6:19-20).

Rather, the way to the Way is to "not prize rare objects" (3, Lin), and to "act without appropriation" (10, Lin). Here we also get a sense of wu-wei, especially when read together with chapter 64 (Lin): "He who acts, spoils; he who grasps, lets slip."

> There is no greater curse than the lack of contentment,
> No greater sin than the desire for possession (46, Lin).

In its contrary, inversion of values sort of way, aim is frustrated by intent, and the Tao instead "rewards those who see the bigger picture, and penalizes those who only pursue personal interest" (79, Benj.). Again, Master Lao finds agreement with Jesus: "Whosoever shall seek to save his life will lose it; and whosoever shall lose (it) shall preserve it" (Lk. 17:33).

As Tao rewards those not seeking a reward, "He who is contented is

rich" (33, Lin). Chuang-tzu asks we "consider the lilies of the field" (Mt. 6:28, Lk. 12:27), so to speak, when we regard the Tao's recompense for scorning material gain: "He (the Sage) has money to spend, food and drink, and does not know where it comes from" (Lin 129, in re ch. 20). And so, "(t)hough sages dress shabbily, they hold luminous treasures in their hearts" (70, Benj.; Lin translates "luminous treasures" as "jade").

With his castoff uniforms, tarnished epaulets, battered sword, and boots worn through, Norton surely cut a shabby figure--his contemporaries made endless note of it--but he also held a "luminous treasure," his imperial dream, in his heart. But not a treasure born of contentment, for who is content and still wants to be a monarch? Unless he is especially altruistic, and in it for public service and not personal aggrandizement. But there is much to suggest that Norton's motivation was noble, and nothing to suggest he was in it for riches.

Norton, of course, received no riches for his imperial pains. He had been used to the finer things as a successful businessman, and the contrast of his later mode of living must have been a painful one. Yet he managed to keep a room, get his lunches for free (or nearly so), seldom drank (and never to excess), spent his days reading and playing chess. His uniforms were by no means bespoke, rather whatever he could find or was given to him. He could hardly have been said to be a slave to his tastes.

But was Norton truly content? Certainly he lived quite modestly, and seemed sufficiently comfortable for a man without means. This does

not mean, however, that he wanted nothing more, and some of this apparent "contentment" was simply that Norton had no other choice.

To catalogue Norton's stated wants, he wanted the money he supposed was being held in trust for him by "one or two of the directors" at First National Bank; he sought a pension from the state legislature; he often petitioned the same or the San Francisco city board for a new uniform; he evidently wanted to "annex" an empress (though he made only lukewarm efforts to attract one); and he desired a suite, fit for an emperor, at the appropriately named Palace Hotel, in part because he could hardly win a queen for his Empire from a boarding room scarcely bigger than a jail cell. The only time Norton is recorded to be petulant is in a letter to the brother of Ulysses Grant, Senator John Grant, where he decries his want of a suitable palace (Drury 158). But all these manifold wants may not have been for himself (or not entirely), but for his cherished imperial project.

Norton seems not to have "grasped and let slip" too much in his imperial years. It is certain that, earlier as a businessman, he had been very un-wu-wei about losing his case over the rice shipment, which would not have ruined him except that he pursued it through the courts until there wasn't another dime for lawyers--or himself. In contrast, as emperor, when collecting his "taxes," he gratefully received his pittance and moved along. And so, as Master Chuang says of the Sage, the means simply appeared, and Norton "got by with a little help from his friends," so to speak (Giles 151). Seeing the luminous treasure in his heart,

these friends rewarded Norton for his big-picture thinking--and also for not overstaying his welcome in their offices and lobbies.

So, whether we consider Norton as content in his poverty, he is, in Taoist sense, rich--in his daily bread, in his friendships, and in honor.

3.2.3. Sobriety.

As established, Norton was always continent in drink. What is meant by sobriety, in a Taoist context, is seriousness of purpose. The Sage rarely acts, so as to avoid unintended consequences, and so when he does act, it is with seriousness and intention.

> (A) great ruler cannot indulge in frivolity,
> Else he will lose his focus.
> And he cannot allow himself to abandon his self control,
> Else he will lose all his control (26, Benj.)

Or, as Lin translates it, "In light frivolity, the Center is lost; in hasty action, self-mastery is lost." "Hence, the Sage eschews excess, eschews extravagance, eschews pride" (29, ibid.)

Norton never "drops the act," and from 1859 to that fatal day in 1880, Norton presented himself as Emperor of the United States (and also Protector of Mexico, later). Every action, every public word, evidently, was taken or said in furtherance of the imperial project.

In person, the Emperor was serious, possessed of a taciturn mien and steely blue eyes. He was courteous, formal in speech and manners, and dignified in his carriage. If affronted, he would simply turn away. The

single exception (Drury 84) was when he saw a lithograph of himself and the curs Bummer and Lazarus, pictured together at a lunch counter, displayed in a store window. He banged fiercely on the window with his fists, demanding the shopkeeper to remove the offensive item. It was lese majeste, and Norton would not have himself cast in a comical light.

This is not to say he had no sense of humor: in fact he was known to have a subtle sense of humor (Lloyd 133), often betrayed only by a twinkling eye and look of bemusement. He was even known to tell a joke. Still, he would not have a cartoon made of himself, literally, and thereby see his great project and sacred charge, the Empire, injured. "How can a ruler of a great country make light of his body in the empire?" (26, Lin). Everything was for and about the Empire.

3.2.4. Aloofness, impartiality.

The Sage-king is by his very nature set apart, both as sage and king. As sage, his perception and perspicacity often runs counter to accepted wisdom. His meager lifestyle and unconcern for gain sets him up for scorn, especially within his own family--"no prophet welcome," indeed (Lk. 4:24)--where the pressure to contribute to the clan's success is great, and a duty according to Confucian filial piety. The Sage-king is therefore counter-cultural.

> I am the one left out,
> My heart must be that of a fool,
> Being muddled, nebulous!

> The vulgar are knowing, luminous;
> I alone am dull, confused.
> The vulgar are clever, self-assured;
> I alone, depressed. ...
> I alone differ from other people,
> And value drawing sustenance from the Mother (20, Lin).

This "sustenance from the Mother" (Tao) holds little worth to "the vulgar." "I alone am mild, like one unemployed" (ibid., Lin). Or as Benjamin has it, "The people are gainfully employed, yet I remain stubbornly idle.

Being "idle" does not mean freedom from responsibility. His responsibility is to humanity itself, not simply human industry and material gain. "The Sage walks all day, but never abandons his cargo" (26, Benj.). "In the midst of honor and glory, he lives leisurely, undisturbed" (ibid., Lin). "It is only when his duty is done that he can go back to being unconcerned and aloof" (ibid., Benj.).

As has been noted, this burden is a lonely one, but the loneliness itself is an asset. "Most men hate to be lonely and disrespected, yet great men can see the value in being an outsider" (42, Benj.). Or as Lin has it,

> To be 'orphaned,' 'lonely,' and 'unworthy' is what men
> hate most.
> Yet princes and dukes call themselves by such names,
> For sometimes things are benefited by being taken away from,
> And suffer from being added to.

From the outside, the willingness to undertake such an unpopular task as sagehood is, is not easy to understand, but rather "folly" and "confounding," and any value in it is unseen.

> All the word says: my teaching (Tao) greatly resembles folly,
> Because it is great; therefore it resembles folly.
> If it did not resemble folly,
> It would long ago become petty, indeed! (67, Lin).

Benjamin renders the same thusly:

> Though everyone knows Tao is great
> It appears utterly confounding.
> Of course, it is only because it is confounding
> That it can remain so great--
> If its meaning could be easily picked apart,
> It would have long ago lost all value!

Thus, the inscrutability of sagehood in a way safeguards its usefulness, in the way that a powerful tool, by outwardly appearing useless or incomprehensible, defends itself from theft. The Tao is not a pair of shears to be borrowed by a neighbor, only to be returned six months later, blunted and covered in rust.

Of course, no one's choice of modus vivendi is more inscrutable than the choice to become "emperor" of America. Surely, for all his admirers and well-wishers, Norton was the loneliest man. Lonely "lies the head that wears a crown," Shakespeare could just as well have written (Henry IV, Second part, Act III, sc. 1). It is indeed lonely at the top.

Filial piety was not a consideration for Norton. He had already disappointed John Norton in his early business attempts, before John died; Sarah was dead, and his siblings scattered in Africa and Europe. He had no empress or issue. The only one left to feel embarrassed by Norton was his adolescent acquaintance Nathan Peiser, and only because Peiser happened to put ashore in the Misty City, 10,000 miles and a hemisphere away from where they first met.

Even without the demands of filial piety, if Norton felt any, he made a tidy purse after coming to California with an already significant inheritance. Of course, his fortunes would reverse again, and he had already lost his mother, his father, and his father's respect, before finally losing his inheritance and fortune. We may, however, view his "loss as gain" from the perspective of wu-wei. Norton had expended great energy and capital in trying to wrench Fortune's hand from off his wheel. According to wu-wei, if we force a thing, we will probably break it. It is a lesson we cannot say Norton explicitly learned--especially in his first decade as emperor, during which he still tried hard at doing--but whether he learned it or not, it was a lesson dearly bought. If he had learned it, however, he would find himself in agreement with Master Lao and St. Paul, the latter for whom loss was gain, and "wisdom is folly" (1 Cor. 1:21, 3:19).

And what did Norton gain? To say loss is gain is to imply an exchange, the loss of one valuable thing for the gain of another, an exchange that cannot take place without necessary loss. The two valuable things cannot co-exist, at least not at the same time, if ever, so as to say, One cannot have one's cake and eat it, too.

One of the things the Norton might have gained was the imperial project, the great ideal, his raison d'etre, the "sustenance from the Mother"--which he certainly couldn't have done as a businessman with concerns, at least if he wanted them to be successful ones. Undoubtedly Norton went to bed hungry on occasion, but his dream, the "luminous trea-

sure" of his heart, gave him nourishment enough, of the spiritual sort.

Though hungry, and unemployed, Norton was not idle. Daily he went about the work of an emperor, reading the papers, attending lectures, quizzing experts, and turning all these data into his wise newspaper edicts. Forced to be aloof, he was nevertheless not without care. From 1859 to 1880, Norton tirelessly beat the pavement in service to the Empire, never once "abandon(ing) his cargo" (or burden; Lin translates this as "provision cart," punning on the Chinese word for "heavy," p. 153).

* * *

The Sage-king, holding himself aloof, is ideally positioned to be an impartial ruler. "Being tolerant, (the Sage) is impartial; being impartial, he is kingly" (16, Lin). Lao-tzu quotes an even older proverb when he writes, "(T)he Way of Heaven is impartial; it sides only with the good man" (Lin 308). Chuang-tzu adjures the Sage-king to "be impartial and belong to no party" (Lin 30).

The reason the Sage doesn't go in for cabals or cliques is that it limits the breadth of the information he receives:

> The Sage has no fixed ideas about anything,
> So he takes in a broad range of information--
> Not only from the admired,
> But also from the shunned,
> And so doubles the value he receives.
> He entertains not only the credible,
> But the incredible as well,
> And so multiplies his libraries of learning" (49, Benj.).

Of course, having "no fixed ideas about anything" would seem to be poor advice for a worldly ruler, but, from the standpoint of wu-wei, being doctrinaire is hardly "going with the flow." The Sage is supple of thought, and realizes that the ideation of Tao can obstruct the realization of Tao. Master Lao would likely agree with the sentiment of that venerable Zen koan, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him."

Thus the Sage's rejection of partisanship--just as he rejects all immoderation and extremes--constitutes a sort of inclusiveness for the marginal, the "shunned" and "incredible," and so, like a rising tide, floats all boats:

> It is best to be like water.
> Water benefits all things...
> Because it dwells even in low places,
> it is of benefit to all--
> Even the unpopular and rejected (8, Benj.).
>
> He (the Sage) helps all,
> Without rejecting anyone, nor anything (27, Benj.).
>
> Therefore the Sage is good at helping men;
> For that reason there is no rejected (useless) person
> (ibid., Lin).

It is only during times of martial conflict that the Sage-king shuts his court to all but the closest, most sober advisors. "In ordinary affairs, a wise ruler gives precedence to inclusion. It is only in wartime that he elects the path of exclusion" (31, Benj.).

Emperor Norton, as a businessman and early in his imperial career, was a Democrat. When, after he had lost his fortune, he wanted to run for the lucrative position of tax collector and sought the Democratic en-

dorsement. His early Democratic inclination in the Civil War for "evolution over revolution" and an orderly, negotiated solution to the issue of slavery, soon gave way to disgust, and he banned both parties. The Emperor criticized Lincoln, but then lamented him in death. Though previously a Democrat, he wanted Andrew Johnson hung by Johnson's toes. He was the emperor of all Americans, and party mattered little compared to competency. It was a sense of self-competency that impelled Norton to take up the imperial mantle. Had he achieved practical power, he likely would have introduced a technocratic, meritocratic bureaucracy that would benefit all Americans alike--even the "shunned," "the unpopular and rejected." "He helps all, without rejecting anyone, nor anything."

Norton's definition of "all Americans" was unusually broad for his time. He believed in justice for the Chinese, and even bodily placed himself in the way of a white, anti-Chinese mob. The official gazette of his empire, the Pacific Appeal, was advocacy journal for freed slaves, and its editor, Peter Anderson, was black. In the Indian Wars, though he would brook no insurrection, his sympathies were with the dispossessed, harrassed, and hunted aboriginal peoples. He even extended his protective aegis over the mestizos and indios south of the border, as the self-appointed Protector of Mexico. His imperial tide would float all these boats as well.

Norton may have desired a wider court of advisors, but it seems he had only a few personal counselors. Among these were the Methodist minister, Oscar Fitzgerald (73-6), Unitarian minister Horatio Stebbins

(Drury 160), and Charles Murdock, enthusiastic Unitarian and the official printer of the imperial scrip, whom Norton had charged with the task of assembling a council of state to select a suitable consort (Drury 168, 195; 166). What he lacked in formal advisors, the Emperor made up for with his voracious reading at the various reading rooms that admitted him, and frequent appearances at public lectures--"taking in a broad range of information," "multiplying his libraries of learning."

Not rejecting anything, he "entertained not only the credible, but the incredible as well." When Norton received obviously spurious telegrams, he nevertheless kept and studied them. Even if the sender meant to poke fun at him, perhaps the telegrams inadvertently contained some worthy idea or caution.

3.2.5. Humanity, benevolence.

Within Chinese philosophy, there is the concept of jen, which may be translated as humanity, humaneness, benevolence, and altruism, among still others. It features most explicitly in Confucianism, but is also present in Taoism, more as a given. The Tao Te Ching is a manual for the enlightened ruler; if one didn't have a sense of goodness or a desire to serve the people--if one didn't possess jen--what would he or she be doing reading it?

Another reason jen may go unstated in the Tao Te Ching is the dichotomy of naturalness in Taoism versus the idea of personal cultivation

in Confucianism. To Confucians, jen is innate but only latent, which must be cultivated continually by self-examination. To the Taoists, jen also is innate, but if you have to think about it, you don't have it. If you do have it, you just do it naturally, as part of your nature. Both systems hold jen as a foundational good and source of ethical motivation. But whereas Confucians conceive of jen as a love for others, the Taoists take it further and define it as selflessness, both in the sense of having only others' best interests in mind, but in terms of egolessness. The Sage's interests align only with the people's, not his own, which permits him to act selflessly. As with the eternal churning of yin and yang ( 陰陽 ), it is difficult to say where the Sage ends and the people begin. Jen is an ecology.

Norton clearly possessed humanity and benevolence. His humanity is best displayed by his racial sensitivities. He thought it shameful that no Chinese evidence could be admitted in court, and his wrath sore when Chinese workers were killed in Los Angeles. He admitted that Native Americans had been abominably used, and his favored gazette was formerly an abolitionist paper, turned journal for African-American improvement and advocacy. When John Brown was hanged, the Emperor waxed indignant that a lunatic, as he adjudged Brown to be, would be put to death and not just in an insane asylum.

If only by the depth of his apparent parental, paternal feeling towards all people--Americans, Mexicans, immigrants--we may say Norton was benevolent, possessed of happy intentions and good will. His empire may

have extended no further than San Francisco, but he united San Franciscans under his fanciful yet somehow regal patronage.

> The Sage dwells in the world peacefully, harmoniously.
> The people of the world are brought together into a community of heart,
> And the Sage regards them all as his own children (49, Lin).

His subjects were all his heart, the center and object of his great project, the Empire, and they were happier for it.

We must ask, however, how exactly altruistic was the Emperor? Did he get nothing from the experience but some rarified, saintly satisfaction?

> Those of the highest character do not think about virtue,
> Which is why they are the most virtuous...
> Beneath the virtuous are the (merely) benevolent are moved by a code of valor,
> And so must strive for honor and accolade (38, Benj.).

We do not know how studied the Emperor's character and bearing was. It is difficult to say with certainty whether he was "merely" benevolent, or genuinely acting from the depth of his character. It seems incredible to think he was motivated only by some pro forma code of chivalry, like a male chauvinist who holds a door for a woman.

We may observe that Emperor Norton enjoyed some of the trappings of his high office. He wore a uniform, was greeted as "Your Majesty," went to lectures and public performances for free, was admitted to private reading rooms as though he were a member, rode public transport for free, and so on. Some of these may be viewed as perquisites, and there is no doubt he enjoyed them, but enjoyment does not per se prove corrupt in-

tent.

It is often difficult to tease out some of Norton's intentions. Did he desire a suite in the Palace Hotel for his comfort and pride, or to enhance his image in the furtherance of the imperial project? A stated reason for wanting suitable lodgings was his desire for a wife, having been advised he would need an improvement in accommodations first. Given how comically small his boarding house room was, this would certainly be true. Was his desire for a wife a corrupt one if he desired her for companionship and love, instead of purely instrumentalizing her to add to the stature of the Empire and extend the imperial bloodline? Were it the latter case, all human feeling would be overthrown and we would rightly be repelled. In this instance, virtue would have to include a little self-interest for virtue to exist. And, of course, "the labourer is worthy of his hire" (Lk. 10:7).

Where jen and impartially meet, there is cosmopolitanism, in the sense of being human above cult, clan, city, or country. The Sage-king does not shepherd his compatriots for being his compatriots, but because they are human beings in need. Their citizenship is besides the point. It is because he loves others as himself that the Sage can be entrusted with whatever is put in his care.

> Therefore, he who values the world as his self,
> May then be entrusted with the government of the world;
> And he who loves the world as his self--
> The world may then be entrusted to his care (13, Lin).

Benjamin's version of the same chapter puts cosmopolitanism in an

ecological light, as a social balance, central to the equilibrium of which is the Sage:

> For those who regard themselves as a part of a much
> greater whole,
> Praise and blame no longer elicit unease.
> Undivided from environment,
> They care about the world as much as they care
> about themselves.

Norton's love for all people (except perhaps Napoleon III) has been mentioned. Blacks, whites, East Asians, Mexicans, Native Americans; Jews, Catholics, and Protestants alike--all found favor with this gentle, gracious monarch.

And Norton is quite literally a man of the world. He was born in England, lived half his life in South Africa, then sailed around the world to a city as diverse as any other. What may also have contributed to Norton's cosmopolitanism--whether a secret Bourbon or not--was his Jewish upbringing, which would have given him an outsider's perspective, the better to see beyond nationality, caste, or religion.

### 3.2.6. Yielding, receptivity.

The Sage realizes that willfulness and rigidity will lead to being broken, as a reed bends with a strong wind, while a mighty oak will have its branches snapped off. The Sage does not draw lines in the sand, and he is nowhere to be found at the Alamo or the O.K. Corral.

> Only that which is humbled can be improved...
> By not claiming to be right,

> He becomes righteous.
> By not admiring himself,
> He merits admiration.
> By not being arrogant,
> He emerges as a natural leader.
> It is only because he does not fight with the world,
> That the world embraces him with ease.
> The old masters said, "He who surrenders, wins" (22, Benj.).

(Lin translates "old masters" as the "ancients," and the concluding proverb as "To yield is to be preserved whole.")

The key word here is supple. "Attending fully and becoming supple, can you become as the newborn babe?" (10, Feng & English, hereafter abbreviated as F&E). Lin translates the first clause as "In controlling your vital force to achieve gentleness," pointing to the necessity of restraint for suppleness to exist.

Chuang-tzu (Lin 135) gives additional insight into the preservative quality of yielding:

> The mountain trees invite their own cutting down; lamp oil invites its own burning up. Cinnamon bark can be eaten; therefore the tree is cut down. Lacquer can be used; therefore the tree is scraped. All men know the utility of useful things; but they do not know the utility of futility.

Already we can see yielding is a neighbor to wu-wei. While the one is active, the other is passive; wu-wei is creative, and yielding receptive. Wu-wei can be summed up by saying, "If you force a thing (such as a seized lever or bolt), you will break it off." Yielding heeds the old Japanese warning, "The nail that sticks up is hammered down."

But receptivity is something more than mere yielding. Like wu-wei, there is a creative component, almost transformative. One's surrendering

allows for some new beneficial situation to arise.

> Respect power,
> But maintain receptivity.
> Being receptive, one lies underneath the world,
> And protects the power of its undifferentiated potential
> (28, Benj.)

Lin Yu-tang's translation puts it in more strictly sexual terms:

> He who is aware of the Male,
> But keeps to the Female,
> Becomes the ravine of the world.
> Being the ravine of the world,
> He has the original character (Te) which is not cut up,
> And returns again to the (innocence of the) babe.

We may at first rebel against this thoroughly un-modern conception of gender, but it nevertheless forms a part of the ancient understanding of yin-yang, the eternal cycle of waxing and waning, decay and renewal. Yang is thought to be male--active, bright, light, dry, airy; while yin is female--passive, dark, heavy, and moist. One extreme gives way and blends into the other, perpetually. Its sexual imagery is meant to convey surrender (consent to the sexual act), which leads to the creation of a new thing (a child), which could not have come about otherwise. Receptivity is openness to, and cooperation with, the dynamic of yin and yang.

Chapter 10 produces more of this biological imagery, in starker terms: "In opening and closing the gate of heaven, can you play the part of the female?" (Lin). Benjamin's version is somewhat less explicit: "As you grow wise and knowledgeable about many things, can you retain the modesty of an amateur?"

Chapter 66 carries forward the theme of female passivity, and con-

cavity (for want of a better term), while adding in the image of that most beloved of Taoist elements, water:

> What makes rivers so noble and respected
> Is that they skillfully adopt the lower position.
> This is why the fertile valleys all flourish around them...
> In this way,
> Though the Sage actually sits above them,
> The people do not feel his weight.
> Though he stands out in front of them,
> He does not block the way (Benj.)
>
> Therefore the humble is the root of the noble.
> The low is the foundation of the high (39, F&E).

(Though the Tao Te Ching seems to have women somewhat pigeonholed by their sex, Emperor Norton was, if not for outright equality, at least sympathetic to and supportive of women's suffrage (Gazis-Sax par. 30, Lumea par. 21). Ahead of his time yet again, it would be 50 years after his death before his female subjects would get the vote.)

Norton, though righteous in his proclamations, and commanding in his physical presence, rarely insisted when refused, receiving his "tax" or due in dignity. When rebuffed, he simply moved along, sure the fault was not his. While in his first decade as emperor, Norton would frequently follow up on a decree with another decree insisting the first be obeyed. In his second decade, the Emperor was often content to speak his piece and then let his word settle on what ground it fell. If they germinated, they did so organically, in their own time. This is yielding.

There are two incidents that come to mind, however, when Norton failed to yield. One was the occasion where his Majesty spotted an insulting lithograph in a shop window. The other was when he was refused

free conveyance on Leland Stanford's Central Pacific railroad. The Emperor raised a stink in print, and Stanford, whose public image was in a tarnished way already, was forced to announce the Emperor could ride in his trains for free, as was his imperial due (Drury 6, 174).

To see how Norton exhibited receptivity is somewhat less apparent. The chapters of the Tao Te Ching which inform us about receptivity also activate Anglo-Saxon prudery and tittering, obscuring the concept and how it may apply to the Emperor's reign. We may set aside talk of "gates," "valleys," "ravines," and so on, and instead simply represent receptivity as yielding plus creativity, or yielding that allows new conditions or opportunities to arise.

To wit: when Norton was arrested for lunacy, he submitted to Officer Barbier's handcuffs, comes along quietly, and takes his place in a jail cell. His meek but dinified submission--so evocative to a Christian point of view--must have helped produce outrage at this mistreatment of San Francisco's gentle monarch, and to lastingly galvanize public affection for the Emperor.

When, on another occasion, Norton was traveling by rail, his Majesty seated himself in the dining car and proceded to order a repast (Drury 174). The waiter demanded proof the shabby-looking monarch could pay his bill first. His dignity insulted, Norton nevertheless remained perfectly regal in comportment, moving the other passengers to raise a ruckus and take up a collection to see Norton was fed like the king they esteemed him to be. The manager found it necessary to come out and apologize to

the Emperor and his outraged subjects.

In both instances, a loss not actively resisted against unfolds organically into a gain, naturally, without force. Acting by not acting is, of course, the definition of wu-wei.

3.3. Wu-wei: not trying, not striving.

At length we arrive at the ethic of wu-wei, the way of the Way, so central to Taoism as practiced in the everyday world. It is what separates the Sage-king from mere tyrants and nincompoops. Not being ham-fisted, rather wu-wei calls for an economy of action, as Tao accomplishes every necessary thing without human intervention (albeit on its own schedule).

> The Tao never does,
> Yet through it everything is done.
> If princes and dukes can keep Tao,
> The world will of its own accord be reformed (37, Lin).

Or as Benjamin has it:

> Tao doesn't do anything,
> And yet somehow it gets everything done.
> If the mighty could also eschew (trying),
> Everything in the world would naturally thrive.
>
> One strives less and less,
> Until all acction unfolds without (striving).
> Although one appears to do very little at all,
> Everything important is achieved.
> To effectively husband the world,
> Do not wrestle with it.
> Obstruct its natural flow,
> And you will find yourself pushed aside.

This latter chapter ends with a warning about not "going with the flow": stand against a torrent and you will be swept away. Tao is an irresistable universal force we foolishly, and futilely, insist upon pushing against, as if it was something to be bested. We are in Tao's house, and the house always wins. Luckily, the Tao holds no grudges.

> The Tao of Heaven
> Blesses, but does not harm.
> The Way of the Sage
> Accomplishes, but does not contend (81, Lin).

> Tao does not contend, yet it conquers.
> It does not speak, and yet it answers.
> It does not request, and yet it receives.
> Though it slacks, it succeeds.
> Its web is loosely woven,
> And yet nothing falls from its embrace (73, Benj.).

"Therefore," Chuang-tzu concludes, "from a great number of small defeats, I achieve the great victory" (Lin 105). Allowing Tao to have its own natural, impersonal way may seem like a personal defeat, but eventually it provides on its own good time, perhaps sooner and certainly with less effort than if one had fought and struggled and forced the desired outcome. Such human impositions interrupt the natural flow of Tao, inviting Newton's Third Law of Motion (i.e., that every action has an equal and opposite reaction) and disaster.

Master Chuang again writes:

> Through inaction the heaven becomes clear. Through inaction, the earth remains at peace. From the combination of the two (heaven and earth) in inaction, all things of the creation are acted upon. Evasive, elusive, does not (the Tao) have a form? All things multiply and grow from inaction. Therefore it is said, "The heaven and earth do nothing and everything is done." How can man learn this example of inac-

tion? (Lin 133).

Human activity is overwhelmingly the cause of human suffering. Stop doing, and Heaven provides without all the collateral damage that attends human effort. "Consider the ravens," Jesus asks us in St. Luke's Gospel (12:24), "that they sow not, neither reap; which have no store-chamber nor barn; (yet) God feedeth them...". Like the lilies, if we neither toil nor spin, Heaven will still provide, and, just as importantly, our inaction will not elicit a cosmic reaction.

Emperor Norton would have profited by this doctrine in his business days, when his wealth did not suffice, and he set about his disastrous scheme to corner the market on rice. A precondition for the practice of wu-wei is patience, and had Norton been but patient, he would have made more money by attending his established businesses, leaving well enough alone. Joshua Norton might have lost a great deal in the crash of 1857, but the cycles of business are a part of the natural ebb and flow of Tao: all things in their time wax, and also wane.

Of course, losing a tenth of one's wealth ($820,000 out of eight million) is a disappointment, but not a fatal one. Where Norton really "ganged agley" was his endless litigation, the cost of which was evidently far more injurious than the supposed swindle that occasioned it. One could say the Emperor learned his lesson, as his later "feuds" against the curs Bummer and Lazarus, or the street characters George Washington II or Prince Stellifer (Lane 114-121; Drury 84, 112-5), were mild and did not involve lawyers. One time in 1875, late in his reign, Norton picked

a fight with real estate developer Charles Peterson (Drury 191-2) and lost, costing him his imperial gazette, the Pacific Appeal. Thereafter Norton would let his displeasure be known only by exhibiting the imperial backside and an elevated nose. "Harrumph," he might have said, if only to himself.

3.3.1. Acting without object.

The source of striving is usually found in objectives, after which people monomaniacally drive themselves, often to their's and society's detriment. In eschewing object, the Sage conforms himself to Tao, taking his cue from the natural rhythms of the cosmos in its organic waxing and waning. "Living without object allows us to live in harmony with Nature" (3, Benj.), for "Tao is good at...achieving design without obvious design" (73, Lin).

> Why is Nature (Tao) eternal and enduring?
> Because it does not have any ends.
> Because it lacks any goals,
> Nature cannot fail to succeed (7, Benj.).
>
> Both the Tao and the Sage nurture the people
> Without assuming any ownership over them.
> The act without expecting results,
> And lead without controlling (10, ibid.).

Of course, Norton never heard of Tao or upward conformity (to Tao, or T'ien, or Nature). Rather, Norton was full of objectives, chief among which is the great imperial project. Other schemes (goal-oriented plans of action and nothing nefarious) include his disastrous attempt to corner

the market on rice, and, after his imperial ascent, his collection of "taxes," his sale of imperial bonds, and his patent on railway switches.

On the other hand, though he intended for a bridge and tunnel to span the Bay, he did nothing more than command it be done, as to plant the idea in people's heads, so that, in effect, when they finally do it in 1933, "(t)he people all remark, 'We have done it ourselves'" (17, Lin), giving Norton no credit for the idea. (It took a few years for the Clampers to remind San Francisco of its debt to Norton. Norton had also called for the straightening of Petaluma Creek, but happily he was appreciated by the residents of Petaluma in his lifetime.)

In his daily routines, he seemed to let his stately manner and paternal gaze do the work of governing, acting-not-acting by his Te. The city was lent dignity, and citizens and public servants made aware the Emperor was watching, lest his Majesty be offended by the sight of an obstructed sidewalk or a fireplug out of service. In this respect, he obtained his objectives--an orderly, well-run city--with a surgical economy of action.

3.3.2. Ruling without being seen, taking credit.

The passage immediately preceding reads more fully:

> Of the best rulers,
> The people (only) know that they exist...
> But (of the best), when their task is accomplished,
> their work done,
> The people all remark, "We have done it ourselves."

Benjamin paraphrases:

> The greatest rulers are barely known...
> The best rulers take no credit for their achievements.
> This makes the people feel they have governed themselves.

As far back as 1876 (Lloyd 130-4), Emperor Norton is a figure of intense public curiosity and speculation, and yet remained mysterious. A century and a half later, we feel as though we know scarcely more. Norton seems to have been locally quite famous--one in 25 San Franciscans attended the Emperor in death, and the cortege was two miles long (Drury 201)--and the center of cultish admiration, the high priest of which was a younger Mark Twain (Drury xvii-xviii; 214-20). And though Norton retains a cult-like devotion, and today's San Franciscans are at least peripherally aware of him, ask the average American if they know of Norton, and one will receive a blank stare--as would have been the case in 1876. And though San Franciscans may be aware of Norton, they (or rather their politicians) resist renaming the Bay Bridge or Transbay Tube for him, insisting "we have done it ourselves."

Of course, Norton was quite proud of his railroad switch invention, and would have been immensely happy to receive a patent for it. The question for us is whether he would have liked the bridge or tunnel named for him (and perhaps a toll levied for the imperial treasury). It is certainly possible, conversely, that he would have been simply gratified that such a work had accomplished for the benefit of people. Norton leaves the question open to speculation.

> Tao flows everywhere...
> Everything in the universe relies upon it,
> Yet it doesn't expect anything in return.
> It provides the ground for all things,
> Yet requires no tithe (34, Benj.).

Of course, Norton is no wilting flower, and ceaselessly proclaimed his empire, in the papers and by his stately progress throughout the city on his daily promenade.

> (Tao) works diligently,
> Yet seeks no merit (credit).
> In the same way,
> The Sage does not seek greatness.
> This is how he finds it (ibid.).

We doubt very much that Norton was entirely without penchant for self-aggrandizement. He had a perfect conceit of himself as emperor. This said, the imperial pretense was subordinate to the Grand Project, a noble undertaking to restore justice, impose order, and conduct government scientifically, rationally, and no longer by vigilante mobs, party bosses, and robber barons. Had he continued in the hauteur of the first half of his reign, he may not have achieved greatness, but in his second decade he relied more on his dignity (Te) than fiat, which has probably served to enhance his legacy.

> Working without taking credit (10, F&E),
> (The Sage) acts but does not appropriate;
> Accomplishes, but claims no credit (2, Lin).

As noted, Norton "required a tithe," in the form of his "taxes," sales of imperial treasury bonds, and even a proposed state pension (as well as the occasional change in vestiture), but these amounted to pittances, chalked up to operating expenses. And as for credit, the Emperor

was rarely obeyed so as to claim credit, but it may be possible to infer that he would enjoy being credited, but did not insist. When things were on an even keel, he made no decrees, announcing his imperial will and pleasure; it was only when something was wrong or lacking that he brought his full majesty to bear.

3.3.3. Ruling without violence, coercion.

Central to the idea of non-action is non-violence, for what could be more forceful than force?

Men Wu-kuei (presumably a student of Chuang-tzu) asked the Master, "Was the world at peace when Emperor Shun came to govern it?" No, Chuang-tzu replied, or there would be no reason for it to be governed. "Of old, when Yao governed the empire, he made the people live happily; consequently the people struggled to be happy and became restless. When Chieh governed the empire, he made the people live in misery; consequently the people regarded life as a burden and were discontented" (Lin 57, 60).

That Chieh, the last emperor of the Hsia and a tyrant, should be criticized is not surprising; what is surprising is that Master Chuang also criticized the deified pre-dynastic emperor Yao--traditionally held as the ideal monarch--for not practicing wu-wei. That he does not level the same disapprobrium at Emperor Shun suggests that Shun ruled with a potent but imperceptible touch.

It is this light touch--laissez-faire--that characterizes the application of wu-wei to the exercise of political power:

> In loving the people, and governing the kingdom,
> Can you rule without interference?
> To be chief among men without managing them--
> This is the Mystic Virtue (10, Lin).

The worst breach of non-interference, of course, is violence. Newton's Third Law in physics, or karma in the Indic religions, illustrates the consequences of force--give a push and expect a shove in return. Thus,

> The Sage eschews the use of force...
> Though force may bring about a quicker triumph,
> It will also sow the seeds of disaster.
> Force runs contrary to Tao,
> And so culminates in catastrophe (30, Benj.)

We may view Nature's (Tao's) economy of force through the lens of science, in slow yet inexorable geological processes, whereby mountains are grown up over millions of years, and ground to sand and gravel over further millions of years. Tao proceeds at an organic pace, glacially sometimes, but with continuous and cumulative pressure. The Sage conforms to Tao, and so he too rules with a light but consistent touch.

> Those who want to rule the world by force
> Will surely fail.
> The natural way of things should not be tampered with.
> For when one tries to divert it, one destroys it,
> And where one tries to grip it, one fumbles it...
> When arrogance is avoided,
> Achievements come naturally, easily, and each in their own time (29, Benj.)

Warfare is the worst example of state violence. Wars are costly in materials and in human suffering and lives, and usually do not yield a

lasting, satisfactory result. World War I was just a rematch of the Franco-Prussian War, and World War II was just a rematch of World War I. The Sage avoids war as useless, but also because it is clumsy, ham-fisted, and inhumane, and so it does become him or speak well of one's ability to rule skillfully.

> Soldiers are weapons of evil.
> They are not the weapons of a gentleman...
> Even in victory, there is no beauty,
> And he who calls it beautiful
> Is one who delights in slaughter.
> He who delights in slaughter
> Will not succeed in his ambition to rule the world (31, Lin).

Or as Benjamin poetically phrases it:

> The wise ruler employs his militia only as a last resort
> And is never enthusiastic about it.
> For to delight in war is to delight in death.
> And he who delights in death
> Will himself be subsumed by it.
> Thus, when forced into battle,
> One should bitterly mourn the massacre of one's adversaries,
> And commemorate victory not with a parade,
> But with a wake.

Avoiding force does not merely avoid disaster, but in fact is counter-intuitively what yields results. While the resort to violence may seem the most natural response, Master Lao believes it to be unnatural and contrary to Tao. We have had our natural impulses denatured by civilization; rediscovering what is natural--what accords with Tao--is what will unlock successes. But otherwise, having a heavy hand is like handling a bar of soap. Grip it loosely and it falls from one's hand, of course, but gripping it too tightly yields the same result.

"Sharp weapons of the state should be left where none can see them"

(36, Lin), and "Temper a (sword edge) to its very sharpest, and the edge will not last long" (9, Lin). Or as Benjamin has it, "An oversharpened blade will (soon) be broken." "The more sharp weapons there are, the greater the chaos in the state" (37, Lin). Obviously, having weapons around is dangerous enough, because they are tempting to use to literally slash through an opposition. "Though there be armor and weapons, (there is) no occasion to to display them" (80, Lin).

The path to conquest lies not in conquering, or indeed trying to do anything or actively influencing the situation:

> By continual losing,
> One reaches doing nothing.
> By doing nothing, everything is done.
> He who conquers the world does so by doing nothing.
> When one is compelled to do something,
> The world is already beyond his conquering (48, Lin).

A subtler form of violence is coercion. We have already read Chuang-tzu's criticism of the emperors Yao and Chieh, who forced the people to either be "happy" or subjected them to tyranny. But the Sage-king does neither, and leaves the people alone to find their own equilibrium:

> (W)hen the government interferes with their lives,
> The people contend with each other for advantage...
> So the Sage cultivates a sharp wit,
> But does not use it to cut dullards down.
> He speaks honestly, but does not insult.
> He deals directly, but does not bully.
> Though his wisdom illuminates,
> It does not blind or dazzle (58, Benj.).

Thus the image of the sharpened blade is reintroduced, this time metaphorically aimed not at an enemy army, but at one's own people. Here wu-wei does not seem to be total inaction, but rather restraint, and an

economy of action. The Sage-king is witty, honest, and direct, but does not use these to pummel the people or adversaries, but instead using them to enhance his Te. Whatever he wishes to achieve, he does so by his own personal magnetism.

> When the people have no fear of force,
> Then (as is common practice) great force descends upon them...
> Therefore, (the Sage) rejects the one (force) and accepts the other (gentility) (72, Lin).

As with spanking children, soon the people become numb to pain, and an escalation of force occurs to maintain compliance. The Sage-king knows the utility of honey in catching flies, and the futility of vinegar in accomplishing the same.

> Guiding without interfering (51, F&E),
> (Tao) mentors without imposing its authority (ibid., Benj.).
> (Tao) is superior, and does not control the ten thousand things (ibid., Lin).

The "ten thousand things" is a Chinese idiom for the uncountable, everything, "all under Heaven" (T'ien-hsia, 天下 ). The Sage, of course, conforms to the example of Tao, as does Heaven, and therefore allows events to unfold in their own time, without trying to force them. This is a cosmological principle that becomes concrete and practical in the ruling of people.

> Movement overcomes cold,
> (But) keeping still overcomes heat.
> Who is calm and quiet becomes the guide for the universe (45, Lin).

Or, as Feng and English have this last line, "Stillness and tranquility sets things in order in the universe," underlining the cosmological cor-

respondence with Sagehood.

The world has hardly been at peace these last 500 years, as it was not in Norton's day. The American Civil War aside, the middle 19th century saw the Opium Wars, the Crimean War, the Franco-Prussian War, the Zulu War, the First Boer War, and, in the United States, the Indian Wars. This is not to mention the various revolutions, revolts, and upheavals that gripped Europe in years following 1848. Except perhaps for scale, it was no different for Emperor Shun "when he came to govern (the world)." So whether he was the best solution, at least we can say there was some occasion for Norton to offer his services to the world, or at least the American corner of it.

We have already reasonably established that Norton would like to have managed the Empire very closely, being inclined to engineer the world according to his scientific, rational notions of a well-ordered state. We therefore turn our gaze to Norton's relationship with violence. The Daily Alta, upon the occasion of his 1867 arrest for lunacy, rightly observed that he had "shed no blood, robbed nobody, and despoiled the country of no one." In the absence of any actual violence we can point to, we must examine the Emperor's apparent inclinations, though frustrated, towards the use of force.

As the businessman Joshua Norton, he had joined the first Vigilance Committee in 1856. He did so not out of any personal viciousness, but because law enforcement had failed to keep the city safe, particularly vis-a-vis the arsons that destroyed lives and property. Nevertheless, he

recoiled at mob justice's scorn of due process, and was not on the roster of the next formation of a Vigilance Committee.

Norton was not shy, however, of ordering troops to clear the halls of Congress or garrison the Halls of Montezuma, actions that might not be perfectly bloodless had they occurred. That said, Norton offered to broker peace between the warring American states, negotiate a new constitution for restive Mexico, and arbitrate the conflict between the Modoc nation and the U.S. Army.

Nor was he bashful of ordering arrests when his decrees were ignored, whole legislative bodies not excepted. In one case, that of President Johnson, he threatened execution for corruption and incompetence--surely cruel and unusual punishment, but he had already abolished the Constitution. Unaware of any irony in doing so, he ordered the arrest of George Washington II, King Stellifer, spiritualists, and other "lunatics." And, had the army but consulted his Majesty, John Brown would have been committed to "our lunatic asylums," rather than consigned to the gallows. Here, as with the rough justice of the Vigilance Committee, Norton felt a want of due process. However, in the different treatment he gave to Andrew Johnson, the Emperor had less sense of proportionality, but he found corruption and ineptitude to be entirely incompatible with the good order of the state.

It is disorder that seems to have annoyed Norton the most, and his calls for force were motivated by a desire for the peace to be quickly restored, rather than out of any bloodthirstiness. Order, in his view,

was a precondition for any solution or progress. There is one occasion, however, when Norton seemed genuinely delighted by a war, when Germany defeated France in the Franco-Prussian War. This seems not to have stemmed from any ghoulishness, but as a blow to his dynastic enemies (being a secret Bourbon), the Bonapartes.

Politics aside, the Emperor was neither vicious of speech nor poisonous of pen, preferring courteousness, dignity, and staying above the fray. He was sharp wit, but not cunning; spoke honestly, but without insult; dealt directly, but preferred persuasion before resorting to the threat of troops. And his wisdom illuminated, but suspicions of his madness dulled any brilliance that may have blinded.

Though known more for the bombast of his proclamations, perhaps what should be best remembered for is his cultivation of personal gravity, moral force, and regal bearing--what Master Lao would call his Te.

## 3.4. Te: the Virtue of the Way.

With all this talk of not doing, and using no force, how then does the Sage-king actually accomplish anything? Certainly, he sometimes applies a light, imperceptible, surgical touch; and often things resolve themselves when left alone. But another way of doing-not-doing is the Sage-king's Te, his power or virtue, made innate by his adherence to wu-wei. He is not observed to be busy or intrusive, he is no showoff, is impartial, aloof, even mysterious. This is engenders a natural sense in

others of the Sage-king's personal gravity, dignity, magnetism, wisdom, and unstated authority. This is what is meant by Te, a notoriously difficult word to translate.

The metaphysics of Te are that of upward conformity: the king conforms to the example of Heaven, and Heaven conforms itself to Tao. Te likewise conforms to Tao. "The marks of great Character (Te) follow alone from the Tao. Human virtue is an expression of Tao" (21, Lin). As in Christianity with the Son and the Father (q.v. Jn. 14:9-11), if you've met the one (Te), you've met the other (Tao).

Because he is void of personal motive or guile, the Sage-king can be un-self-conscious and spontaneous. Te has a moral dimension:

> The man of superior character (Te) is not conscious of
> his character,
> Hence he has character.
> The man of inferior character (is intent on) not
> losing character,
> Hence he is devoid of character.
> The man of superior character never acts,
> Nor ever (does so) with an ulterior motive.
> The man of inferior character acts,
> And (does so) with an ulterior motive (38, Lin).

Even down to the present day, we would question the virtue of a busybody and a schemer, and rightly distrust anything such a person has to say. This is, to make a pun, wu-Te, no-virtue.

Te is difficult to translate not merely because we lack an analogous term, but even in Chinese the concept is hard to characterize, almost needing to be understood on an intuitive level:

> The wise ones of old had subtle wisdom and depth
> of understanding,

So profound that they could not be understood.
And because they could not be understood,
Perforce must they be described:
Cautious, like crossing a wintry stream,
Irresolute, like one fearing danger all around,
Grave, like one acting as a guest,
Self-effacing, like ice beginning to melt,
Genuine, like a piece of (unvarnished) wood,
Open-minded, like a valley,
And freely mixing, like murky water (15, Lin).

This serves as a sort of litany, a checklist for determining what Te (and the Sage-king) looks like. Lao-tzu offers another such, and apophatic, inventory:

Therefore the Sage embraces the (Tao),
And becomes model of the world.

(Note here the hint at upward conformity, this time of the people to the Sage-king.)

He does not reveal himself,
And is therefore luminous.
He does not justify himself,
And is therefore far-famed.
He does not boast of himself,
And therefore the people give him credit.
He does not pride himself,
And is therefore the chief among men (22, Lin).

The message is clear: one does by not doing, and Te is achieved by not seeking Te. This is like the Buddhist paradox (§ 1.8. supra), where in order to achieve enlightenment, one must not desire to be enlightened.

Act without force,
Work without will,
Taste without prejudice,
Regard the tiny as great,
And a dearth as an abundance.
Reward an enemy with kindness (63, Benj.).

One who has Te can naturally influence and attract a following, even without any trappings of office (indeed these would probably injure his Te, should he lean on them). If one un-self-unconsciously plays the Sage-king, everyone will spontaneously and organically regard him as such:

> He who follows the Tao is identified with the Tao.
> He who follows (Te) is identified with (Te).
> (But) he who has not enough faith (in himself)
> Will not be able to command faith from others (23, Lin).

("Command" here should not be taken in an imperative sense, as this would not accord with the ethic of wu-wei, but rather should be read as "to draw out" or expect.)

Intuiting his sagehood, the people intuitively follow the Sage-king without force or coercion. Part of this subconscious telegraphing of leadership is paternal feeling, not in the way of sexism, hierarchy, or condescension, but a genuine parental concern for his subjects:

> The Sage dwells in the world peacefully, harmoniously.
> The people of the world are brought into a community of heart,
> And the Sage accepts them all as his own children (49, Lin).

The whole motivation of the Sage-king is the commonwealth, not because he has concern, but because he <u>is</u> concern. Concern is his being, and he naturally, unconsciously lives in accord with his being. This is Te, and this is why the people follow easily and unreflectingly, trusting in his genuiness.

> Therefore the Tao gives (the people) birth,
> Te fosters them,
> Makes them grow, develops them,
> Gives them a harbor, a place to dwell in peace,

Feeds them and shelters them (51, Lin).

Benjamin renders the same passage as follows:

> Everything in the world esteems Tao, and glorifies
> virtue (Te).
> Yet Tao's esteem and (Te)'s glory
> Are not bestowed upon them.
> Rather, they arise naturally.
> Tao provides life and nurtures it,
> Rears and nourishes it,
> Shelters and matures it,
> Sustains and protects it...
> It mentors without imposing its authority.

Master Lao chooses here to use Tao and Te in place of personalizing the same principles in the person of the Sage-king, but it matters not: the Sage-king is Tao and Te, and Tao and Te are operate in him.

Emperor Norton ruling through his Te is a central question of this thesis, along with his application (however unwittingly) of wu-wei. It is tempting to say his Te was unearned. After all, he simply walked into a newspaper office and declared himself emperor, without a movement, a revolution, a struggle. (Certainly, none of these would be very wu-wei; and it is a principle of Te that to seek it causes one to lose it.) Of course, by the time of his arrest in 1867, when the newspapers howled their indignation on his behalf, enlisted public sympathy, and, in doing so, solidified Norton's enduring popularity; and with this, his ability to influence popular opinion merely by his royal bearing and moral weight. Whatever he achieved in the 1870s, it was based in Te he had built in 1860s.

But this reservoir of goodwill goes back earlier, to Norton's busi-

ness activities in the 1850s. When he had fallen into penury and supposed madness, it was relief from his fellow Freemasons, and the "taxes" willingly paid by old associates, that floated Norton in his early years as emperor. His involvement in the first Vigilance Committee--though perhaps regretted--would have made him a community leader in the eyes of law-and-order citizens, and also a moral leader in the eyes of those who admired Norton's principled stand against summary justice, whether they approved of the aims of the Committee or not.

Master Lao holds that wu-wei is the foundation of Te. We do not wish here to re-litigate Norton's adherence to wu-wei. It would appear he only practiced it as the only option open to him. Yet, he obviously possessed Te, as demonstrated by his influence and well-regard, despite lacking any levers or anvils, so to speak, to bend people into respecting him. If Taoism denies him authentic Te, it is possible that other schools of ancient Chinese philosophy, such as Confucianism or Mohism, would have granted it to him based on their own definition of it, with their own models of a more active style of leadership.

We can turn to the "litanies" (chapters 15, 22, 63) to see which boxes Norton ticks in the checklist of sagehood in Te. Chapter 15 lists these as cautious, irresolute (flexible), grave (formal, courteous), genuine, self-effacing, open-minded, and mixing.

Norton was probably incautious in declaring himself emperor. Most people, even if they think they would make a good king, and feel themselves to be regal, keep it to themselves rather than damage their social

relations or standing, by appearing egotistical or, worse, insane. That said, Norton was capable of caution in selecting a wife--perhaps too cautious, as he never secured one. In courting Captain Edgar Wakeman's daughter Minnie, he did so circumspectly, asking her to "keep your own secret," adding, "it's safer that way, I think" (Drury 184). He obviously understood that while people might smile or snicker at a self-declared emperor, his "gone a-courtin'" of a teenaged girl, smitten as he was, would have opened himself to the worst ridicule.

Flexible and open-minded are kindred terms, but not quite. The Emperor was open to whatever was reasonable and scientifically provable. He was no racist and freely mingled with all races and classes of people (mixing). He nevertheless did not show much flexibility in his core beliefs or values. These being virtuous, we can applaud his constancy of feeling. But he also showed an ability, particularly later in his reign, to let a subject drop when his decree was repeatedly ignored, and he was able to switch tacks and sell imperial treasury notes when his "tax" base dwindled. (Though this hardly amounted to more than trading one expediency for the indignity of another.)

Norton was certainly courteous, being formal in manners, paying every social courtesy and grace. He was fond of taking out his boutonniere and giving into to small girls as a small, kind-hearted gesture. He was certainly genuine, genuinely regal, which genuineness his popularity depended on. George Washington II and King Stellifer had attempted to establish themselves by dint of will, but failed to secure public affection

because they appeared to be mere gimmicks, an act. Norton felt like the genuine article--if genuinely mad.

Norton could not be said to be self-effacing, however. He was not imperious, but used the majestic plural (We, Our), wore a uniform, and insisted upon his monarchical courtesies and prerogatives being observed. Doing otherwise would earn a wilting look, or worse, a sharp reproof. He would not be abused or allow liberties or familiarities to be taken with him. He mixed freely with all walks of life, but he was God's annointed king wherever he went.

Chapter 22 states the Sage-king does not justify himself, does not reveal himself, and does not pride himself. That Norton did not justify himself is probably true: he might reveal his reasoning or motivation in a proclamation, but never made excuses, secure as he was in his dignity. He certainly revealed himself in his inaugural proclamation in September, 1859, and in every decree thereafter. He was a public figure, often seen about town in his imperial finery. He did not seem to pride himself in the sense of vanity or self-satisfaction. Only once did his pride get the better of him when he found himself sharing a comical lithograph with the curs Bummer and Lazarus, pounding on the shop window with both fists. Ordinarily when insulted, he would simply remove his person elsewhere.

The litany of chapter 63 lists no force (wu-wei), no will, no prejudice, regards the tiny as great and dearth as an abundance, and repays an enemy with kindness. No force, sometimes; no will hardly ever; but no prejudice, at least in a racial sense, always. In that way, he regarded

the lowly (blacks, Asians, Native Americans) as being wronged and deserving better. Whether Norton considered his means as sufficient has been parsed elsewhere, but in short, even when he hoped for more (particularly the means to support a family), he seems to have made do well enough.

Did Norton reward his enemies with kindness? He seemed at the very least to have had some sense of proportionality. The insurrectionist John Brown ought to have been put in an asylum; so too with spiritualists, whose delusions excited the Empire's credulous peoples overmuch. He certainly would have done the same with George Washington II and Stellifer (the latter actually was committed, though not at Norton's behest), and would have done so with evident relish. The Bonapartes got everything they deserved, it's true; but though he fired Abraham Lincoln as president, he "lamented" him in print after Lincoln's assassination.

The last question that remains to us is Norton's parental feeling towards the subjects of his empire. He usually pointed his decrees at individual public persons and institutions. Sometimes he would regard the nation in personified form. He rarely spoke of the people. He did not regard his subjects as the basis of his political power--that he derived from God's heavenly Mandate--but it cannot be denied that everything he did was all for his subjects. There can be no empire without subjects; no commonwealth without justice. Though he preferred to command his immediate vassals, the politicians and their institutions, he did so to effect the happiness of everyone. As Washington (the First) was the "Father of the Nation," Norton was the father of his empire, and

all we his subjects and children.

3.5.0. Statecraft.

3.5.1. Gentle rulership and laissez-faire.

Now we come to the parts of the Tao Te Ching that concerns practical statecraft. As we know, the Tao Te Ching is a political manual more than an esoteric work of individual development. One of the central tenets, laissez-faire, as we call it in the West, is ruling by wu-wei, to avoid force, both in the sense of pushing change beyond its organic unfolding, as well as using physical force, violence, to achieve those ends. The Sage-king knows that to force a thing risks breaking it, and violence often begets violence.

> The softest thing in the universe
> Overcomes the hardest thing in the universe.
> That without substance can enter where there is no room.
> Hence I know the value of non-action.
> Teaching with words and work without doing
> Are understood by very few (43, F&E).

Master Lao asks the aspiring philosopher-king, "In loving the people and governing the world, can you rule without interference?" (10, Lin). When the Sage-king does act, he does so stategically, swiftly, and surgically--imperceptibly, if possible. But he does with great hesitance, as a last resort, rarely and without relish. Lao-tzu offers the aspiring ruler a culinary metaphor: "Rule a big country as you would fry a small fish" (60, Lin). Benjamin expands slightly: "A Sage governs a large

group in the same way that he would cook a delicate fish: that is to say, he meddles with it as little as possible." Master Lao might as well have mentioned frying an egg: flipped but once at the right time, one gets an over-easy egg; fuss with it, or try to flip it too soon, and one gets (unintentionally) scrambled eggs. It is not a good image for any government.

Another reason for a light touch is that excessive civilization creates ingeniousness and scheming. Like a board game, the more complex and numerous are the rules, the more opportunities there are to cheat. It is this plotting and cunning that makes cities and culture suspect in the Taoist mind. Rather, the Sage dismantles contrivances, de-emphasizes institutions, and cultivates an honest simplicity:

> When the government is unobtrusive,
> The people remain sincere.
> But when the government interferes with their lives,
> The people contend with each other for advantage (58, Benj.).

Lin's translation of the same verse, with a wu-wei emphasis on the evils of striving (busy-ness) and the virtues of non-striving:

> When the government is lazy and dull,
> Its people are unspoiled;
> When the government is efficient and smart (clever),
> Its people are discontented.

Striving by government begets more striving by the people, and soon craft and deceit abound. Not striving is rather a de-escalation that allows honesty to exist. Distrust never creates trust, only more distrust.

The Sage-king tries to be proactive in his attention to affairs: the sooner dealt with, the less he will have to be involved with down the

road, and the less heavy-handed his response will need to be:

> Accomplish do-nothing.
> Attend to no-affairs...
> Deal with the difficult while it is yet easy;
> Deal with the big while it is yet small (63, Lin).
>
> Deal with a thing before it is there;
> Check disorder before it is rife.
> A tree with a full span's girth begins from a tiny sprout;
> A nine-storied terrace begins with a clod of earth.
> A journey of a thousand li (miles) begins at one's feet (64, Lin).

When the king lets matters get away from him, the tool he reaches for is a hammer. Before long, people become numb to the violence, and lose any will for living.

> When the people have no fear of force,
> Then (as is the common practice) great force descends upon them...
> Despise not their dwellings,
> Dislike not their progeny.
> Because you do not dislike them,
> You will not be disliked yourself...
> Therefore, (the Sage) rejects the one (force) and accepts the other (gentility) (72, Lin).

Whatever action the Sage-king does or doesn't take, the motivation is to limit ambition, which lessens striving, which lessens cunning, and without these, the yeoman's life, simple and rustic, pleasant in its rhythms and customs, may attain once more. This simple vision of life is a theme we will return to in the next section.

It hardly must be said that this non-interfering, laissez-faire style of government was constitutionally not Norton's inclination, as established in the sections on wu-wei above. Presented with all the pies, so to speak, of government, Norton would have liked a finger in every

one. His rule, in Master Lao's estimation, would have been overly active and bothersome--in a word, busy.

3.5.2. A small state.

The best state, according to Lao-tzu, for realizing laissez-faire and the simplification of the people, is a small-scale operation:

> (Let there be) a small country with a small population,
> Where the supply of goods are tenfold or hundredfold, more than they can use.
> Let the people value their lives and not migrate far.
> Though there be boats and carriages,
> None be there to ride them.
> Though there be armor and weapons,
> No occasion to display them.
> Let the people again tie ropes for reckoning,
> Let them enjoy their food,
> Beautify their clothing,
> Be satisfied with their homes,
> Delight in their customs.
> The neighboring settlements overlook one another
> So that they can hear the barking of dogs and crowing of cocks of their neighbors,
> And the people till the end of their days shall never have been out of the country (80, Lin).

> The ideal society would be small, with a modest population,
> And enough resource to amass an army,
> Yet no recourse to deploy it.
> They would value their lives so much
> That they would see no reason to venture from home.
> They would maintain vessels,
> But have little occasion to ride them.
> They would store weapons,
> But have little occasion to exhibit them.
> They would return to the old ways of doing things:
> Enjoying their food,
> Taking pride in their appearance,
> Feeling secure in their homes,
> And celebrating the simple life.

> Neighboring villages would stand in plain view,
> Yet they would happily pass their whole lives
> Without ever having bothered to go visit (ibid., Benj.).

The small state is ideal not simply for its manageable size, but because, it was thought, a small state would be a rural one, lacking the trappings of big city life and the burden of empire and worldliness that attends it. Rather the Sage desires to simplify the people, to reduce their ambitions and strivings, guile and wiles. "He keeps empty their hearts, makes full their bellies, discourages their ambitions" (3, Lin). Modern life is the problem, with its complications, elaborations, and scrabbling for money, power, and influence. The simple, pre-modern, rustic, traditional life is the antidote the Taoists prescribe.

San Francisco and Oakland overlook each other across the Bay that Norton's bridge spans. However the two cities feel about each other, Norton desired they should be linked, not kept apart. City life seems to have agreed with Norton, and his lifestyle would not have been possible except for urban living, with free lunch counters and tourists to sell his treasury notes to. And, besides, no one would have paid any attention to an emperor living in Fresno.

Far from advocating a return to a simple life, Norton believed in progress and growth and science, and was full of schemes for all of these. Norton was a cosmopolitan in a very literal sense, living in California, reared in South Africa, and born in England. His capital city was entirely populated by people from someplace else, many coming from 10,000 miles away. This is hardly an idyllic commune that no one ever

visits or leaves, devoid of energy or ambition.

It is true that San Francisco, while quite large, is a smaller empire than the whole of the United States and Mexico he claimed. But it seems to have been actually large enough for Norton, and he managed to rule it, in his whimsical way, to good effect. While he occasionally spoke of undertaking a grand tour of his territories in the east, the Emperor never left the confines of the Bay Area.

3.5.3. Learning.

The Tao Te Ching is not anti-intellectual, but it reserves learning for the Sage-king. For the people, a little bit of knowledge is dangerous, and most will not attain enough learning to be useful, only quarrelsome and clever. Keeping the people simple in mind is how he keeps their desires and lifestyles simple, too. This reputation for anti-intellectualism is earned by sayings such as, "The student of knowledge (aims at) learning day by day; the student of Tao (aims at) losing day by day (48, Lin). In some cases, what is being suggested rather is unlearning, putting away prejudices, keeping an open and supple mind. But just as often, Master Lao means quite literally that knowledge is bad, insofar as the people are concerned. Knowledge is the genesis of all the world's ills--just as it is in Genesis, or Greek myth. Like the Forms of Plato, each lower Form is a poor imitation of the last, the final emanation of which is utterly debased and hardly resembles the original principle.

Lao-tzu recounts this fall from grace in his philosophy:

> On the decline of the great Tao,
> The doctrines of "humanity" and "justice" arose.
> When knowledge and cleverness appeared,
> Great hypocrisy followed in its wake.
> When the six relationships (family) no longer lived at peace,
> There was (praise of) "kind parents" and "filial sons."
> When a country fell into chaos and misrule,
> There was (praise of) loyal ministers (18, Lin).
>
> After Tao is lost, then (arises the doctrine of) humanity.
> After humanity is lost, then (arises the doctrine of) justice.
> After justice is lost, then (arises the doctrine of) li
> (禮, propriety, ritual).
> Now li is the thinning out of loyalty and honesty of heart,
> And the beginning of chaos (38, Lin).

The key word here is cleverness, linked with knowledge, which Master Lao pairs with cunning, disingenuity, duplicity, and betrayal--all derived of overweening ambition and desire. The remedy, he says, is to make people simple: "Banish learning, and vexations end" (20, Lin).

> Banish wisdom, discard knowledge,
> And the people will profit a hundredfold...
> Reveal thy simple self,
> Embrace (thine) original nature,
> Check thy selfishness,
> Curtail thy desires (19, Lin).
>
> The Sage rules by:
> Relaxing the people's hearts,
> Satisfying their needs,
> Lessening their wants,
> And strengthening their character.
> Once he has shown people how to live without craftiness
> and envy,
> Cunning interlopers cannot take advantage of nor trick them.
> Living without objective allows us to live in harmony with
> nature (3, Benj.).

Again, Lao-tzu believes knowledge successively brings comparison, ambition, cunning, dishonesty, haughtiness, and social decadence and dis-

integration. He lays out his program most starkly here:

> The ancients who knew how to follow the Tao
> Aimed not to enlighten the people,
> But to keep them ignorant.
> The reason it is difficult for the people to live in peace
> Is because of too much knowledge.
> Those who seek to rule a country by knowledge
> Are the nation's curse.
> Those who seek not to rule a country by knowledge
> Are the nation's blessing (65, Lin).

The reader may be taken aback by an explicit statement of what in our Western history produced witch trials and book burnings. But Lao-tzu is not opposed to knowledge or learning--just that the people shouldn't concern themselves with it. Rather, it is the concern of the Sage-king, who is meant to think on behalf of the people. After all, it takes knowledge to suppress learning. The reason the Sage-king can be trusted to do so is his lack of desire, his impartiality, and, counter-intuitively, his advanced learning--all of which contribute to his Te, and the ability to rule without doing, by moral suasion. Gathering information, even done covertly for the covert purpose of keeping the people simple, is the central function of the Sage-king as the specialist:

> The Sage has no fixed ideas about anything,
> So he takes in a broad range of information--
> Not only from the admired,
> But also the shunned,
> And so doubles the value he receives.
> He entertains not only the credible,
> But the incredible as well,
> And so multiplies his libraries of learning (49, Benj.).

The Sage-king entertains and considers everything, impartially, gathering a trove of data. This data, to be sure, convinces him that the best

course, if the people are simple, is doing nothing at all:

> Therefore the Sage says:
> I do nothing and the people are reformed of themselves.
> I love quietude and the people are righteous of themselves.
> I deal in no-business and the people grow rich by themselves.
> I have no desires and the people are simple and honest by themselves (57, Lin).

The fish rots, as it is said, from the head, so it lies with the head to keep the body pure. This is accomplished by the Sage-king's Te, by which he moves others without being seen to move himself. Lin uses the word "reformed" in the preceding passage to translate hua (化), meaning "touched, transformed, 'civilized' of themselves by moral influence" (Lin 265).

Having been with us for the whole of this thesis, the reader will already know that Norton fails on this criterion. Entirely enamored of knowledge, learning, and improvement, he was an avid reader, often found in the best reading rooms in San Francisco. And he was a fixture at lectures throughout the city. (Indeed, it was on his way to a lecture when he suffered his fatal stroke.) He possessed an inventive mind, suggesting improvements to the San Francisco streetcar (later adopted), and inventing a new kind of automatic railway switch, which he wanted to patent. In short, Norton believed in education, science, and progress--all of which he wanted to incorporate into the ethos of his empire. If there was a problem with the people, it was because they didn't possess enough learning.

Philosophical Taoists differ on what constitutes progress. Pro-

gress, as we understand it, to the Taoist takes us further and further from the Tao and the simple, pure, and uncomplicated life of the Sage-kingdom. "Progress," so conceived, comes out of ambition, and ambition and striving are the source of every social ill. Rather, progress to the Taoists was turning back and reclaiming the original, primitive folkways that preceded and still attained outside the cities.

Norton, meanwhile, was an institution unto himself in the largest city of the eastern shore of the Pacific, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. Here he devoured information, and thought the world would be a better place if everyone else did the same. At this the immortal Sages, if they were watching, merely sighed and shook their heads.

3.5.4. Justice.

In Taoism, envy seems to be the genesis of ambition, the beginning of the descent away from the Tao. In simplifying the people, the Sage-king eliminates material differences and status markers to lessen desire and competition:

> Exalt not the wise,
> So that the people shall not scheme and contend;
> Prize not rare objects,
> So that the people shall not steal;
> Shut out the things of desire,
> So that the people's hearts shall not be disturbed (3, Lin).

This passage points at a troubling effect of jealousy, namely theft, and not mere squabbling and one-upmanship, which have no legal repercus-

sions. Larceny, in every civilization we know of, has always been prohibited (except for the state and the rich and powerful), with frequently gruesome penalties. The answer, according to Lao-tzu, is to get rid of anything worth stealing, i.e. luxury goods: "When gold and jade fill your hall," Lin translates, "you will not be able to keep them safe" (9), and "That which (is) overloaded with riches will soon be raided (36, Benj.).

Of course, petty theft is a small thing compared to outright plunder by "great" persons. The philosophical Taoists found mere possession of wealth as evidence of wrongdoing. Chuang-tzu writes, "The shameless become rich, and good talkers become high officials" (Lin 80). Master Lao has a name for these people, not unfamiliar to us today: robber barons. These people are so far above the reaches of the law that they can expropriate whatever they want, even from a weak king. Master Chuang cynically observes, "Steal a hook and you hang as a crook; steal a kingdom and you are made a duke" (Lin 124).

> When the court is arrayed in splendor,
> The fields are full of weeds,
> And the granaries are bare.
> Some wear gorgeous clothes,
> Carry sharp swords,
> And indulge themselves with food and drink;
> They have more possessions than they can use.
> They are <u>robber barons</u> (53, F&E; emphasis added).

Some of what we call crimes, however, are natural human behaviors and inclinations, or ancient custom, that an overweening state takes an interest in. In our own time, cannabis prohibitions are a good analogue. Cannabis abuse doesn't appear to harm anyone per se, ingesting mind-al-

tering substances occurs in every culture in every era, and cannabis has a long history in Africa and Asia. This sort of law, Lao-tzu argues, is unnatural, and whenever nature is impeded, outsized repercussions follow, being contrary to wu-wei, non-interference, and impartiality. Put simply, "The greater the number of statutes, the greater the number of thieves and brigands" (57, Lin). Or as Benjamin has it, "By enacting more laws, we create more criminals."

Norton can be safely said to have been a law-and-order ruler. His decree of October, 1859, laid out the evils he believed rife in the land, as his reason for ascending the throne, complaining of "fraud and corruption," constant "open violation of laws," "caused by mobs, parties, factions...and political sects," the people not having the "protection of person and property" with their taxes ought to have guaranteed. Despite being anointed of God ("Dei gratia"), Norton believed in the social contract.

Before donning the imperial purple, Joshua Norton had joined the first Vigilance Committee, which promised to bring malefactors to justice where the public authorities had failed. Nevertheless, Norton soon became disenchanted with the vigilantes, when he introduced a resolution for the committee to ensure that in its prosecutions the accused would be able to plead their innocence and mount a defense. The resolution failed, his sensibilities around fairness and due process were injured, and he did not join the next Vigilance Committee a few years later.

Perhaps it was these committees he had in mind when he referred to

mobs, though surely he also had in mind the party bosses' use of "muscle," and the nativist lynch mobs that targeted Chinese in particular. He certainly had a heightened sense that there was no justice in the realm after his legal troubles. He was further aggrieved for being rebuffed by the local Democratic Party for their nomination for tax collector, on the grounds that Norton was foreign-born. If naturalized, Norton would have been rightly outraged (a cursory search of naturalization records shows no Joshua Norton in San Francisco), but one need not have an objective justification for holding a grievance.

The Gilded Age had begun, and Norton the businessman had tasted of it. But whereas he had built his business on his acumen and well-placed bets, when the tables were turned, he saw fortunes being made through what amounted to little less than appropriation, through bribery and "favors." And even when one couldn't buy a politician, land was just taken by force, with the help of hired goons. Unless they could bring their own force to bear, the dispossessed were simply out of luck (Gazis-Sax par. 43). Of these "robber barons," including the likes of James Lick (who rented Norton his first office) and William Sherman (who seized Norton's properties to satisfy his debts), the Emperor's spat with railroad magnate (and California governor) Leland Stanford over the Emperor's right to ride his trains for free, is the most famous. Norton also evidently believed one or two directors of the First National Bank owed him money that they were unjustly withholding from him. In an era and a place where men simply reached out and took what they wanted, it was per-

haps not entirely an unreasonable idea--albeit a far shot--that Norton could simply declare himself emperor and expect reality to accede to his desires (Gazis-Sax par. 52).

Norton's inaugural fiat of September 17th, 1859, is indicative of Norton's design for laws based upon his decrees, with himself as final arbiter and executor. In two words (Norton's own, in fact): absolute monarchy, which, in that instance, Norton felt would be the only cure for the "internal dissension on Slavery" then tearing the Union apart (Drury 63). He would have ruled by command--indeed, he tried to--if only those in power would have heeded him.

Norton's laws served a simple purpose, to enforce order and rational government. In Taoism, the point of the Sage-king's laws is to reduce desire, the intent being that order and goodness would naturally follow. Norton's laws came from the top, publicly; Master Lao's creep up from bottom, largely unseen. And so, as discussed above, Norton did not take issues with desires--he has many dreams and schemes of his own--and would probably credit them as a motivator, a central tenet of capitalism down to the present day. But rather, Norton would take umbrage the sort of unrestrained desire, the craven ambition, that caused some people to ride slipshod over the backs of others, simply because they can. Upon their heads, the weight of Norton's scales would have weighed most grievously.

## 4.0. Conclusion and further research.

We are at last ready to answer the thesis question, was Emperor Norton the Taoist Sage-king? Well, sometimes, as unsatisfying an answer as that may be.

While it is plausible that Norton achieved political ends (namely a well-maintained and orderly city, bold civil engineering proposals, and shaming the shameless) without political means, by the practice of wu-wei, we have established that Norton did so because no other levers of power were available to him. What he would rather have done is to have ruled directly, with absolute power, and, in this respect, he more resembled a Confucian than a Taoist. Though not weighing Norton as a Taoist, Martin (pp. 44-5) concurs that Norton's temperament was certainly compatible with Confucianism.

Wu-wei aside, Norton's comparability to other properties of the Taoist Sage-king is likewise muddled. He was neither natural nor spontaneous, and was perchance content, but only in a very limited way. He was humane, benevolent, and impartial, with a strong sense of right and wrong and for due process. We can say Norton was sober and possessed of great dignity, and so built his Te to the degree that he was able to achieve his designs by means of wu-wei, even if that was not his preferred mode of governing.

But there were several metrics that Norton conclusively did not meet, including non-violence. He did not shy from ordering arrests or

army interventions, and reveled in the 1871 defeat of the French by the Prussians. And then, of course, there is the matter of his participation in the first Vigilance Committee. In terms of ruling without object or being seen, Norton was quite visible in his activities (indeed, he operated through public proclamations), and had all manner of dreams, goals, objectives, and projects. He was not particularly yielding or "irresolute," but did show in the latter half of his reign-unreign a greater willingness to let matters drop, if only because of the fatigue of his advancing years. Though he ruled only in San Francisco and its environs, the small state was not his ideal and he claimed for himself a much larger empire.

And finally, in learning, Norton was delighted by reading, lectures, and every sort of mental exercise, and thought the people would do well to do the same. He believed in progress, not regress; and if a Sage-king is judged by his ability to simplify the people and return them to an earlier, more primitive, purer state, then Norton the First, by the Grace of God Emperor of these United States, Protector of Mexico, fell far short.

In Norton's defense though, it would be unfair to judge him against a philosophy and a model of leadership of which he was likely entirely unaware. It may be worth asking ourselves whether there has ever been a Taoist Sage-king--the semi-legendary Emperor Shun excepted--and whether this political ideal is even achievable. That question, however, is outside the scope of this work.

All this does not mean Norton was not an enlightened ruler--he was prophetically ahead of his times in many respects--just not a Taoist one in the strictest sense. Regardless, he has remained a perennially popular figure in California history, for well-deserved reasons. It suffices for us to simply conclude that Norton's resemblance to the Sage-king, within the framework of philosophical Taoism, is assuredly mixed at best, and perhaps only superficially, at first glance.

For further research, it would be fruitful to examine Norton's imperial career from a Confucian standpoint, to which we believe there will show a greater correspondence. While were stymied more than once by the destruction of records in the 1906 earthquake, there may be occasion for primary research abroad in South Africa and Brazil for traces of Norton's early life and records of his meeting with Dom Pedro II, respectively.

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