

•Lecture Today

- Admin stuff
- Taoism: some background comments
- The *Tao-te ching*

Admin stuff

- Re Third Assignments: If you don't agree with my evaluation of your assignment, by all means come and talk with me (about why you disagree). (This doesn't mean I'll alter your grade, but I have been known to do so from time to time.)
- At this point you should have at least picked a topic from the list. I recommend talking your ideas over with me. Don't leave this paper to the last minute!

Admin stuff

- The end of the second week of March is upon us. If you want to do your own term paper topic, and you haven't talked with me about it, you need to do so today.
- If I get a term paper on a topic I did not approve, I will not pass it.
- (For all of you doing your own term paper topic - can you email me [afenton2@uwo.ca] your topic by tomorrow evening ... Saturday at the latest?)
- **Term Paper Topic #3:** Note there are two different foci here for a term paper (one dealing with the good life, the other dealing with good government). *Pick one, DON'T do both.*
- Any questions about the term paper topics?

Admin stuff

- Exam date: **April 17th**, at 2:00 p.m. in 3M 3250.
- You'll have a list of potential exam questions on (Tuesday) **March 16** (- next week).
- Your actual exam questions will be chosen (verbatim) from this list.
- What I can tell you about the exam (at this point):
- (i) You will have *some* choice on the exam (you'll be asked seven or eight questions out of which you *must* do five or six).
- (ii) It will be a two hour exam.
- (iii) No aids.
- Any questions?

Taoism: Taoism versus Confucianism

- Where we left off:
- Of the differences between Taoism and Confucianism on proper conduct and good governance mentioned by Koller, the following are noteworthy.
- (1) “Whereas Confucianism stressed the moral goodness of human beings (or at least the moral goodness of our full humanity) [i.e. *jen*] as the key to happiness, the Taoists stressed the harmony and perfection of nature” (*Asian Philosophies*, p.287).
- A note of some importance here: Historically, Taoist’s have been reluctant to pass valuative judgment on events and processes in Nature (e.g. seeing certain natural events, processes, traits or attributes as being of more ‘inherent’ value than others).

Taoism: Taoism versus Confucianism

- (2) Taoists have been very critical of the various human institutions (broadly construed) used by Confucians (and others) to regulate human behavior.
- The imposition of these products of the human imagination (or intellect) onto human social relations is regarded as a non-starter. They fail, according to Taoism, because they do not reflect a(n adequate) knowledge of the *te* of humanity, which is itself grounded in an understanding of the *Tao* (*Asian Philosophies*, p.288).
- ‘*Te*’ is often translated as ‘virtue’. It connotes proper function, or excellence.

Taoism: Taoism versus Confucianism

- (3) Lao Tzu commends a simple life with *few duties* lived in harmony with the *Tao*, in contrast to the Confucian view that the good life requires a conformity to *li* (i.e. a complex system of rules of propriety), with the aim of developing or cultivating our full humanity (*Asian Philosophies*, p.288).
- “He [i.e. Lao Tzu] described the simple life as one that is plain, wherein profit is ignored, cleverness abandoned, selfishness minimized, and desires reduced” (*Asian Philosophies*, p.288).

Taoism: Taoism versus Confucianism

- (4) From this difference in their perspective on the good life, emerges the Taoist emphasis on living naturally.
- Living naturally means living in accord with a knowledge of the *Tao*, and consequently the *te* of humanity (remembering that what counts as proper functioning or human excellence is determined by *Tao*).
- Living in accord with a knowledge of the *Tao*, and consequently the *te* of humanity, involves acting without striving, self-centeredness, or intentions that are informed by 'base' (selfish) desires (*Asian Philosophies*, p.288).

Taoism: Taoism versus Confucianism

- As an aside, this emphasis on a knowledge of the *Tao*, and consequently Nature, as a means to better live our lives leads later Taoists to place a great deal of value on experimentation (e.g. alchemy), observation, and technical skill (which grew primarily out of an experience with the material of use).
- *In contrast to* the Confucians, the knowledge of artisans and farmers was greatly valued by Taoists.
- When coupled with the Taoist's reluctance to pass evaluative judgment on events and processes in Nature, Taoism seems to exhibit a particularly egalitarian 'flavor'.

Philosophical Taoism: A caution

- Do remember that philosophical Taoism, though importantly different from religious Taoism in several respects, is a mystical tradition.
- Ultimately, the knowledge of the *Tao* must be obtained directly, through meditative experience. It cannot be adequately described or talked about. Consequently, it cannot be handed down (as instruction) from teacher to student (*Asian Philosophies*, p.288).

To start us off: the *Tao*

- The term '*tao*' literally means 'path' or 'way' (*Asian Philosophies*, p.288).
- Don't think of the *Tao* as either personal or divine. The *Tao cannot* be so characterized or described.
- It is, as we will see, the ground of both being and nonbeing. (This will later hold the significance that the *Tao* is the ground of *yang* and *yin*). In other words, the *Tao*, for Taoists, is That from which all that exists ultimately arises and is That on which they depend for their continued existence (*Asian Philosophies*, p.291).
- The regulating principles at work in Nature arise out of this (nameless) *Tao* (*Asian Philosophies*, p.288).
- This should all sound *very* familiar.

The *Tao-te ching*: Chapter One

- Chapter One, as Le Guin mentions, is notoriously difficult to translate. I've given you a handout of various translations of this one chapter.
- It also contains the core teachings of the *Tao-te ching*.
- Some things to note:
- The *Tao* is nameless (or “unnamed”, p.3 of your *Tao Te Ching*). This means that ‘*tao*’ is not a name for That.
- All that is finds its origins in That.

The *Tao-te ching*: Chapter One

- “name’s the mother of the ten thousand things” (p.3 of your *Tao Te Ching*) may well be both an allusion to the ultimate unity of All that Is, as well as a reference to the multiplicity of All that arises out of discursive consciousness.
- Wing-tsit Chan writes, “To Lao Tzu, Tao is nameless and is the simplicity without names; when name arises, that is, when the simple oneness of Tao is split up into individual things with names, it is time to stop” (p.97 of his *The Way of Lao Tzu (Tao-te ching)* published by Prentice Hall in 1963).
- The individual who lacks desires sees the Truth.

The *Tao-te ching*: Chapter One

- Some of the last lines (e.g. “Two things, one origin, but different in name, whose identity is mystery”) are *particularly* difficult to interpret.
- Wing-tsit Chan has suggested that the immediately preceding lines to these are best translated,
- “Therefore let there always be non-being, so we may see their subtlety, and let there always be being, so we may see their outcome” (p. 97 of his *The Way of Lao Tzu (Tao-te ching)*).
- When so translated, the “Two things” spoken of in the succeeding line are being and nonbeing (see p.99 of Wing-tsit’s *The Way of Lao Tzu (Tao-te ching)*).

The *Tao-te ching*: Chapter One

- Le Guin writes, “In the last verse, the two ‘whose identity is mystery’ may be understood to be the hidden, the unnameable, the limitless vision of the freed soul - and the manifest, the nameable, the field of vision limited by our wants. But the endlessness of all that is, and the limitation of mortal bodily life, are the same, and their sameness is the key to the door” (p. 112 of your *Lao Tzu - Tao Te Ching*).