

Lecture Today

- Admin stuff
- The *Tao-te ching* concluded ... I think.

Admin stuff

- I need to see Sukhkirán Kaur and Lea Walters.

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 [even this year].)
- Re your Term Paper: I recommend talking your ideas over with me. Don't leave this paper to the last minute!
- Re your own Term Paper topic: 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 - make sure you have emailed your topic to me (afenton2@uwo.ca) (this way you don't get burned).
- Any questions about the Term Paper topics?

Admin stuff

- Re your list of potential exam questions: The only way this exam question list will change is if we do not get to certain topics (i.e. one or two of the latter questions may be dropped if we get too far behind).
- Your actual exam questions will be chosen (verbatim) from this list.
- Are there any questions about the possible exam questions?
- Re the exam:
 - (i) You will have *some* choice on the exam (you'll be asked eight questions out of which you *must* do six),
 - (ii) it will be a two hour exam,
 - (iii) no aids.

Admin stuff

- Remember:
- (a) The more *relevant* material (from lectures, readings or class discussion) you can include in your answer the better,
- (b) this means you really do need to sort out how you will answer a question before the day of the exam,
- (c) don't spend too much time on any one question (don't spend more than twenty minutes on any one question ... and try for fifteen),
- (d) and do network with each other (e.g. form study groups).

Tao-te ching: On proper action and proper character

- Where we left off (roughly speaking):
- Confucian ethics is clearly a target in the *Tao-te ching* (see Chapters **18** or **19**). But note it isn't the end, or ends, that is, or are, being attacked so much as the means (see Chapter **19**).
- The path to living morally in the *Tao-te ching* involves cultivating a life free of (self-centered) desires or attachments and aversions (see Chapters **12**, **15**, **16**, **19**, **22**, **75**).
- It also involves abandoning an anthropocentric view of ourselves and the world around us (Chapters **20**, **35**, **45**, **48**).
- The source of immoral behavior (according to the *Tao-te ching*) are self-centered desires or attachments and aversions (see Chapters **44**, **46**, **49**, **53**, **75**).

Tao-te ching: On proper action and proper character

- This kind of approach or moral outlook **differs significantly** from the emphasis on internalizing *li*, molding or shaping our desires or attachments and aversions, and adopting an anthropocentric view of our-selves and the world proffered in Confucian moral philosophy.
- As many elements of Confucian moral philosophy reflected a not uncommon view of morality in the Chinese society within which the *Tao-te ching* took shape, the author(s) of the *Tao-te ching* can be said to take issue with morality (see pp.289-90 of your *Asian Philosophies*).

Tao-te ching: On proper action and proper character

- Why does the author(s) of the *Tao-te ching* reject morality, as understood by the likes of the Confucians?
- It is thought that as long as (self-centered) desires, and our accompanying conceptions of self and self-fulfillment, continue to enjoy their prominent role in human action, our moralities will act as mere band-aid or reactionary solutions to human immorality, or actions that harm ourselves and others (construed broadly) (see page 289 of your *Asian Philosophies*).
- One of the questions you need to ask yourself when philosophically evaluating this Taoist outlook: Is this claim true, or even plausible?

Tao-te ching: On proper action and proper character

- What does Lao Tzu *mean* by *wei wu-wei* (this is rendered as the phrase “do not do” in Le Guin’s *Tao Te Ching* [see p.6 of your *Tao-te ching*])?
- He doesn’t mean to literally do nothing (at least not all the time) (*Asian Philosophies*, p. 290 or 291).
- After all, and I hate to belay this point, Lao Tzu, or the author(s) of the *Tao-te ching*, place a **great deal of value on a number of moral virtues**. (*These virtues are manifest in our actions.*)
- What’s more, he, or they, also commend a life where desires are minimized, where stillness of mind is cultivated, and where we act without an eye to a conception of our self.

Tao-te ching: On proper action and proper character

- This, arguably, leads Koller (among others) to write,
- “It [i.e. *wu-wei*] means doing nothing except what proceeds freely and spontaneously from one’s own nature” (*Asian Philosophies*, p.290) or “What he means by ‘no action’ is not straining and contriving to accomplish, but letting things be accomplished in a natural and spontaneous way” (*Asian Philosophies*, p.291).
- But what does it *mean* to act naturally, freely or spontaneously?
- Well it can’t mean acting *haphazardly*. This would not, in an obvious way, cultivate the virtues commended by the *Lao Tzu*.
- It also can’t mean acting without *any* concern for the consequences of our actions (for similar reasons).

Tao-te ching: On proper action and proper character

- It seems, then, to imply that:
- (i) Humans have a natural state of mind that is calm, serene and devoid of self-centeredness (i.e. our self conceptions, and devotion to these ideas of self, are our own creations) (Chapters **15**, **16**),
- (ii) desires and preferences (concerning our selves) undermine this natural state (Chapters **19**, **20**, **22**),
- and (iii) if we act ‘from’ our natural state of mind, we will act rightly (Chapters **19**, **37**, **46**, **48**, **49**, **55**, **63**, **81**).

Tao-te ching: On proper action and proper character

- As an aside: This nicely coheres with elements of Buddhist discussions of the enlightened mind (i.e. this was another commonality that facilitated the transplantation of Buddhism from India) (see pp.106-07 of your *Course Pack*).
- Indeed, Zen Buddhists talk of Buddha Nature as a wellspring of goodness that underlies our delusional and ignorant mind. This nicely reflects the Taoist view of the 'natural mind' (see pp.112, 113, 114 of your *Course Pack*).

Tao-te ching: On the good life

- As I said before, to act in conformity to the *Tao* is to live as well as you can (or is the life that *should be* favored above all others) (Chapters 14, **16**, **34**, 37, 45, **46**, 53, **55**, 60).
- What does this mean?
- (i) We ought to act with knowledge of, and in conformity to, Nature's regularities or processes (see Chapters 25, **34**, **45**, **55**, **66**, **76**).
- (ii) We ought to recognize the tendency for Nature to move in cycles of rise (or ascent) and decline (or descent), or from one 'extreme' to the other (see Chapters **4**, **16**, 22, **34**, **77**).
- (iii) We ought to cultivate a self-less view (of ourselves and our place in the world). In this way we emulate the *Tao* (see Chapters 14, **15**, **16**, 20, 44, 48, **55**).

Tao-te ching: On good governance

- As with most of the topics covered so far, the *Lao Tzu* [i.e. *Tao-te ching*] (or author(s) of the *Lao Tzu*) disagrees with the Confucian view of good governance.
- (i) Remember the Confucians thought of the ruler as an exemplar of moral behavior and virtue.
- (ii) Such a ‘sage king’ would ensure that his society’s institutions facilitated, and even encouraged, behavior that conformed to *jen*. He would surely ensure that behavior at the Imperial court was also in conformity to *jen*.
- (iii) By *being seen to be* a person of *jen*, the ruler would inspire the populace to so act (see pp. 276-77 of your *Asian Philosophies* for these points).

Tao-te ching: On good governance

- Lao Tzu, or the author(s) of the *Tao-te ching*, takes a different tact.
- (i) The ruler **should not** be seen (see Chapter **17, 22, 34, 49, 57, 63, 66**).
- (ii) He **should not** force or encourage obedience to a set of moral rules or principles, in or outside of the Imperial court (Chapters 18, 30, **37, 38, 48, 57, 66**).
- (iii) He **should allow** (or make room for) and **ensure the lack of obstacles to** the populace living naturally, to just living in conformity to the *Tao* (as expressed in Nature and in the natural serenity, selflessness, or peace of the human mind) (Chapters **3, 18, 32, 37, 57**).