

Lecture 10

Laozi

Laozi

- LAO-dsuh
 - Lao Tzu = "old master"
 - legendary founder of Daoism
 - perhaps a contemporary of Confucius
 - The Legend
 - A More Likely Story



The Daodejing

- "Treatise on the Way (Dao) and its Virtue/Power (De)
- poetic, suggestive, and short (~5000 Chinese characters)
- many nuances of meaning – and many different interpretations
 - the dao that can be dao'd is not eternally daoing

Harmony

When we renounce learning
we have no troubles.

- *Daodejing* 20

Use words sparingly, then
all things will fall into
place.

- *Daodejing* 23

- One basic theme of Daoist thought is that we should find harmony with natural patterns and tendencies

- fit in with nature instead of opposing it
- be sensitive and aware to what is happening, instead of resisting or distorting

The Uncarved Block

- Daoism emphasizes the freedom one attains by following nature rather than resisting it
 - be like an uncarved block
 - Confucian training is artificial, because ...
 - let things happen naturally, without regulation

Sages enact nonaction and
everything becomes well ordered.

-*Daodejing* 3

Manifest plainness. Embrace
simplicity (be like unheven
wood).

- *Daodejing* 19

If we could renounce our
benevolence and discard our
righteousness, the people would
again become filial and kindly.

- *Daodejing* 19; cf. 18

Pooh hasn't much Brain, but
he never comes to any harm.
He does silly things and they
turn out right.

- Piglet, *Winnie the Pooh*

Social Disorder

- Social disorder results from ...
 - we have an incorrect view of how the world is
 - ignorance leads to frustration
 - frustration leads to conflict and tension
 - the result is social disorder

If we could renounce our
artful contrivances and
discard our scheming for
gain, there would be
neither thieves nor
robbers.

- *Daodejing* 19

By not treasuring
precious things one
brings about that people
do not steal. By not
displaying desirable
things one brings about
that people's hearts are
not confused.

- *Daodejing* 3

Going with the Flow

- *Basic Principle:* strength, success, and longevity are due to ...

- rigidity is self-defeating, because ...
- cork in water
- Tai Chi Chuan

In all the world, nothing is more supple or weak than water. Yet nothing can surpass it for attacking what is stiff and strong. And nothing can take its place. That the weak overcomes the strong and the supple overcomes the hard, these are things everyone in the world knows but none can practice.

- *Daodejing 78*

Going with the Flow

- Being flexible is connected to the flow of **qi** (vital energies) and the balance of *yin* and *yang*

- harmonizing inner energies allows one to "chill"

Concentrating your *qi* and attaining the utmost suppleness, can you be a child?

- *Daodejing 10*

The myriad creatures shoulder *yin* and embrace *yang*, and by blending these *qi* they attain harmony.

- *Daodejing 42*

Going with the Flow

1. If one is flexible, then ...
2. Nature is naturally ordered
3. *Hence*, if one is flexible, then ...

Corollary: Need for laws, rituals, etc is due to ...

Daoist Metaphysics

- "Dao" is the central concept of Daoism
 - **dao** = way, path, the natural happening of things
- Laozi emphasizes that the dao cannot be expressed in words – but words can reveal some of its aspects



The *Dao* that can be expressed is not the eternal *Dao*. The name that can be named is not the eternal name.

– *Daodejing* 1

Daoist Metaphysics

- yin and yang are opposites
 - **Yin**: night, dark, cool, rest, female, receptive, soft, north, winter, even
 - **Yang**: day, light, warm, active, male, aggressive, hard, south, summer, odd
- they are inter-dependent
- and they transform into each other



Daoist Metaphysics

Yang is generated from *yin* and *yin* is generated from *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* mutually alternate, which makes four fields penetrate. Sometimes there is life, sometimes there is death, that brings the myriad things to completion.

– *Huainanzi*, Chapter 2

- The theory of yin-yang raises a problem:
 - If yin and yang are utter opposites (like magnetic poles), what accounts for their interaction with each other?

Daoist Metaphysics

- Answer: the dao
 - Dao is the basis for yin-yang interaction
 - but it is not *something*
 - and it is not *nothing*
 - Dao is the way things are and the source of all change
 - Dao is *wu*

The *dao* produces all things and nourishes them to their full growth, completes them, and sustains them. It produces them and makes no claim to the possession of them. It carries them through their processes and does not vaunt its ability in doing so; it brings them to their maturity and exercises no control over them. This is called its mysterious operation.

- *Daodejing* 51

Daoist Metaphysics

- **wu** = nonbeing, openness
 - formless, amorphous
 - an array of possibilities
 - not a *thing*
 - without *wu*, what there is could have no function
 - without what there is, *wu* is useless



The world and all its creatures arise from what is there. What is there arises from what is not there.

- *Daodejing* 40

Daoist Metaphysics

- Examples of *wu*
 - openings in bottles
 - pauses between musical notes
- Japanese bells



Thirty spokes are joined in the hub of a wheel. But only by relying on what is not there [the empty space of the hub] do we have use of the carriage. By adding and removing clay we form a vessel. But only by relying on what is not there do we have use of the vessel. By carving out doors and windows we make a room. But only by relying on what is not there do we have use of the room. And so, what is there is the basis for profit; what is not there is the basis for use.

- *Daodejing* 11

Daoist Sagely Behavior

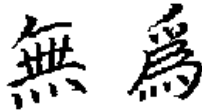
- Daoism recommends that ...
 - dao is both the way the world works *and* the way one should lead one's life
 - thinking of ourselves as agents of our own activity is mistaken

In the pursuit of learning, one does more each day. In the pursuit of the Way (*Dao*), one does less each day. One does less and less until one does nothing [*wu-wei*]. One does nothing yet nothing is left undone.
– *Daodejing* 48

The way of the sage is to act but not contend.
– *Daodejing* 81

Daoist Sagely Behavior

- **wu-wei** = doing (*wei*) nothing (*wu*)
 - acting without a preset agenda
 - being open, flowing, spontaneous
 - not straining and striving to accomplish rigidly set goals
 - birds vs. snakes



People model themselves on the earth. The earth models itself on Heaven. Heaven models itself on the Way (*Dao*). The Way models itself on what is natural [*ziran*].
– *Daodejing* 25

Daoist Sagely Behavior

- When we attain *wu-wei*, our actions ...
 - and we cannot make mistakes, because ...
 - Mistakes are due to ...

Everyone in the world knows that when the beautiful strives to be beautiful, it is repulsive. Everyone knows that when the good strives to be good, it is no good. ...This is why sages abide in the business of nonaction ...
– *Daodejing* 2

Daoist Sagely Behavior

- Wu-wei is effortless

The most supple things in the world ride roughshod over the most rigid. That which is not there can enter even where there is no space. This is how I know the advantages of nonaction!

- *Daodejing* 43



Daoist Sagely Behavior

- Daoism recommends **wu-wei** and yet **not wu-wei**

- "doing without doing"
- *not* the same as not doing anything
- go with the flow, without preconceptions

Act, but through nonaction. Be active, but have no activities. Taste, but have no tastes. ... Plan for what is difficult while it is easy. Work at what is great while it is small.

- *Daodejing* 63

Daoist Sagely Behavior

- Doing without Doing is accomplished by being *ziran*

- **ziran** = self-so, spontaneous, creative, natural

Sometimes things lead and sometimes they follow. Sometimes things breathe gently and sometimes they pant. Sometimes they are strong and sometimes they are weak. Sometimes they fight and sometimes they fall. This is why sages cast off whatever is extreme, extravagant, or excessive.

- *Daodejing* 29



Class Exercise

Take three minutes to draw a picture of the *dao* in your notes.

Be creative.

Daoist Sagely Behavior

- Being *ziran* (open) requires ...

- When we are open, we can be flexible
 - like water
- and we can be creative.

Deep affections give rise to great expenditures. Excessive hoarding results in great loss. Know contentment and avoid disgrace. Know when to stop and avoid danger. And you will long endure.

– *Daodejing* 44

The highest good is like water. Water is good at benefiting the myriad creatures while not contending with them. It resides in the places that people dislike. Hence [its way] comes close to the Dao.

– *Daodejing* 8

Daoist Sagely Behavior

- Ziran is the basis of **de**
 - Confucian vs. Daoist meaning
 - Daoists disparage the Confucian emphasis on cultivation and training, because ...
- Daoism takes being passive and responsive to be the key to virtuous living
- Confucianism takes being active and responsible to be the key to virtuous living

The Ideal Daoist Ruler

- Confucianism assumes that there is a fixed set of moral laws
 - this is why it recommends that rulers rule by *tianming*

- Daoists deny the assumption, because ...
 - how one should act is not fixed by *tian*
 - laws and rituals are band-aids

When the Way was lost there was Virtue.

When Virtue was lost there was benevolence.

When benevolence was lost there was righteousness.

When righteousness was lost there were the rites.

The rites are the wearing thin of loyalty and trust, and the beginning of chaos.

– *Daodejing* 38; cf. 58

The Ideal Daoist Ruler

- Daoists recommend that rulers be invisible in action

- minimalism
- allow the government to ...
- don't resist or try to change what happens
- anticipate problems

If a great ruler rules, the people hardly know that he exists.

– *Daodejing* 17

I do nothing and people transform themselves. I prefer stillness and the people correct and regulate themselves. I engage in no activity and the people prosper on their own. I am without desires and the people simplify their own lives.

– *Daodejing* 57

Reading for Next Time

Kupperman, chapter on Zhuangzi

The Zhuangzi, in Readings

Journal #2 (three entries) due next class!
