

**PHIL 3541 Topics in Ancient Chinese Philosophy: *Daodejing***  
**Term 1, 2016**  
**Course Outline**

**Time: Monday 13:30-16:15**

**Location: ERB703**

**Course Overview**

This is a reader course of Laozi's *Daodejing*. It will cover the major themes of Dao, virtue (*de*), non-action (*wuwei*), rulership, self-cultivation, and naturalism (*ziran*), and lesser-known ones such as, non-being, death, and language. What you will take away from this course is a new appreciation of Laozi's vision of the world, his calling attention to the weaknesses of human nature and that, despite its long history, the *Daodejing* remains as relevant today as ever.

**Learning Outcomes**

1. Identify the main themes of the *Daodejing*.
2. Assess the significance of Laozi's philosophical style and argumentation.
3. Be able to defend the *Daodejing* from attack by other schools of early Chinese philosophy (e.g., Confucianism, Legalism, Mohism).
4. Reflect on the value of Laozi's philosophy to contemporary society.

**Topics**

See lecture schedule below

**Learning Activities**

1. Read and give thought to the assigned readings.
2. Develop the skills mentioned above in the Learning Outcomes.
3. Improve your research skills through various writing assignments.
4. Attend lectures and engage your fellow classmates in discussion on the material presented.

**Assessment Scheme**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Weight</b>
Class Participation	-	15%
Reflection Papers	5 papers @ 2 pp each, 5 marks each	25%
Research Essay 1	5 pp, due week 8	30%
Research Essay 2	5 pp, due week 13	30%

Reflection Papers

You are to write **5** reflection papers on **5 separate** lectures over the duration of the course. In which weeks

you choose to do so is up to you. **Late papers will not be accepted after 24 hours.** The reflection papers cover the lectures from weeks 3 through 12 (weeks 2 and 13 are excluded). These are not research papers; they are your own reflections on the text and class discussion. Try to relate the material to your own life experience and explore how Laozi's philosophy is helpful, if at all. **Do not use long quotations;** one or two lines is enough. The format should be: 1-inch margins, double-line spacing, 12 pt. font. I will deduct marks for larger margins or font size. The length of each paper is 2 pages. You can write more if you like but anything less than **2 full pages** and I will deduct marks. Each paper is worth 5 marks and will be assigned based on the detail and originality of your discussion; if you simply summarize the text, I will deduct marks.

### Research Papers

You are to write **2** research essays, in English, on a topic of your choice about the *Daodejing*. If you are unsure of a topic, ask for my help. **Comparative studies are not allowed.** I will post a comprehensive bibliography on Blackboard for you to download. Only **journal articles** included in this file are allowed (search for them on the library website). If you have trouble locating an article, ask for my help. **No online or Chinese materials are allowed.** The first essay is due in week 8; the second is due in week 13. **Late papers will not be accepted after 24 hours.** The format should be: 1-inch margins, double-line spacing, 12 pt. font. Marks will be deducted for larger margins or font size. Include a cover page with the paper's title, your name and student number, the course code, and date of submission. The length of each essay is 5 pages, not including the bibliography (use a separate page at the end). You can write more if you like but anything less than **5 full pages** and I will deduct marks. You must use proper citations throughout your paper (in-text or footnote). If you are not sure how to do this, use any of the articles you have downloaded as a guide. Each paper is worth 30 marks and I will assign these based on how well you organize your arguments, how clearly they are written (having a well-defined thesis is vital), and your ability to use the work of scholars to strengthen your own writing.

### Course Materials

There are many translations of the *Daodejing* available. You are responsible for obtaining a copy yourself. If you wish to consult the original Chinese, you can find it here: <http://ctext.org/dao-de-jing>.

### Course Schedule

Week	Lecture Topic & Guiding Questions	Chapters to Read	Remarks
<b>1</b> (Sep 5)	Inauguration ceremony; <i>No Class</i>	Coutinho's <i>Introduction</i> (see Blackboard)	
<b>2</b> (Sep 12)	<b>Dao</b> What is it? How does it function? How can we know it? Why should we follow it?	1, 4, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16, 18, 21, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 46, 47, 48, 51, 53, 55, 59, 60, 62, 65, 67, 73, 77, 79, 81	
<b>3</b> (Sep 19)	<b>De (Virtue)</b> How is <i>de</i> the virtue and power of Dao? Is <i>de</i> accessible to everyone or just the king/sage? Can Dao exist without <i>de</i> ? How about humanity?	10, 21, 23, 28, 38, 41, 49, 51, 54, 55, 59, 60, 63, 65, 68, 79	
<b>4</b> (Sep 26)	<b>Being and non-Being</b> Which comes first? How are the two related? How are they related to Dao? Why is non-being important to Laozi?	1, 2, 4, 6, 10, 11, 14, 21, 25, 32, 34, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 46, 51	

<b>6</b> (Oct 3)	<b>Heaven and Earth</b> Are they the same? Is Heaven equal to Dao? Can humans know Heaven? Is Earth not Nature or are Heaven and Earth equal to Nature?	1, 5, 6, 7, 23, 25, 32	
<b>7</b> (Oct 10)	Public Holiday; <i>No Class</i>		
<b>8</b> (Oct 17)	<b>Death</b> Is death the end of life? Should we fear or accept it? Is change natural? How far should we change things, including ourselves?	6, 33, 42, 50, 67, 74, 75, 76, 80	Research Essay #1 due
<b>9</b> (Oct 24)	<b>Wuwei (Non-Action)</b> When is non-action better than action? How is non-action related to naturalism? When is naturalism a bad thing?	2, 3, 37, 38, 43, 48, 57, 63, 64	
<b>10</b> (Nov 7)	<b>Ziran (Naturalism/Spontaneity)</b> Nature vs Nurture debate, which one used by Laozi? Can one be natural and spontaneous at the same time? How does one balance cultivating <i>de</i> with living naturally?	17, 23, 25, 51, 64	
<b>11</b> (Nov 14)	<b>Self-Cultivation</b> Why do we cultivate ourselves? Is self-cultivation related to non-action or naturalism? Is self-cultivation a form of mysticism?	1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 12, 15, 16, 19, 24, 28, 44, 48, 52, 54, 56, 63	
<b>12</b> (Nov 21)	<b>Sage</b> What is the difference between a sage and a wise person? Does the world need sages? Will a sage make a good ruler? How can they do so if they follow non-action?	2, 3, 5, 7, 12, 19, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 47, 49, 57, 58, 60, 63, 64, 66, 70, 71, 72, 73, 77, 78, 79, 81	
<b>13</b> (Nov 28)	<b>Language</b> Why do we have language? Where does the authority of language come from? Is it possible to communicate without language? Do we rely too much on language?	1, 2, 5, 8, 17, 22, 23, 27, 31, 41, 43, 56, 62, 66, 69, 70, 73, 78, 81	Research Essay #2 due

\* This schedule is tentative and subject to change.

### Details of Course Website

Relevant announcements and course documents will be posted on Blackboard.

### Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at: [http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academic\\_honesty/](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academic_honesty/)

## Contact Details

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