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Week 6 Laozi

GenEd1091: Classical Chinese Philosophy and Political Theory



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Share your favorite passage from the *Daodejing*



What is the “Way” in the Laozi?



Chapter 1

A Way that can be followed is not a constant Way.

A name that can be named is not a constant name.

Nameless, it is the beginning of Heaven and earth;

Named, it is the mother of the myriad creatures.

And so,

Always eliminate desires in order to observe its mysteries;

Always have desires in order to observe its manifestations.

These two come forth in unity but diverge in name.

Their unity is known as an enigma.

Within this enigma is yet a deeper enigma.

The gate of all mysteries!



What is the “Way” in the Laozi?



Chapter 25

There is a thing confused yet perfect, which arose before Heaven and earth.

Still and indistinct, it stands alone and unchanging.

It goes everywhere, yet is never at a loss.

One can regard it as the mother of Heaven and earth.

I do not know its proper name;

I have given it the style “the Way.”

Forced to give it a proper name, I would call it “Great.”

The Great passes on;

What passes on extends into the distance;

What extends into the distance returns to its source.

And so,

 The Way is great;

 Heaven is great;

 Earth is great;

 And a true king too is great.

In the universe are four things that are great and the true king is first among them.

People model themselves on the earth.

The earth models itself on Heaven.

Heaven models itself on the Way.

The Way models itself on what is natural.



What is the “Way” in the Laozi?



Chapter 40

Turning back is how the Way moves.

Weakness is how the Way operates.

The world and all its creatures arise from what is there;

What is there arises from what is not there.



What is the “Way” in the Laozi?



Chapter 42

The Way produces the One.

The One produces two.

Two produces three.

Three produces the myriad creatures.

The myriad creatures shoulder yin and embrace yang;

By blending these qi, “vital energies,” they attain harmony.

People most despise being orphaned, desolate, or forlorn;

And yet, barons and kings take these as their personal appellations.

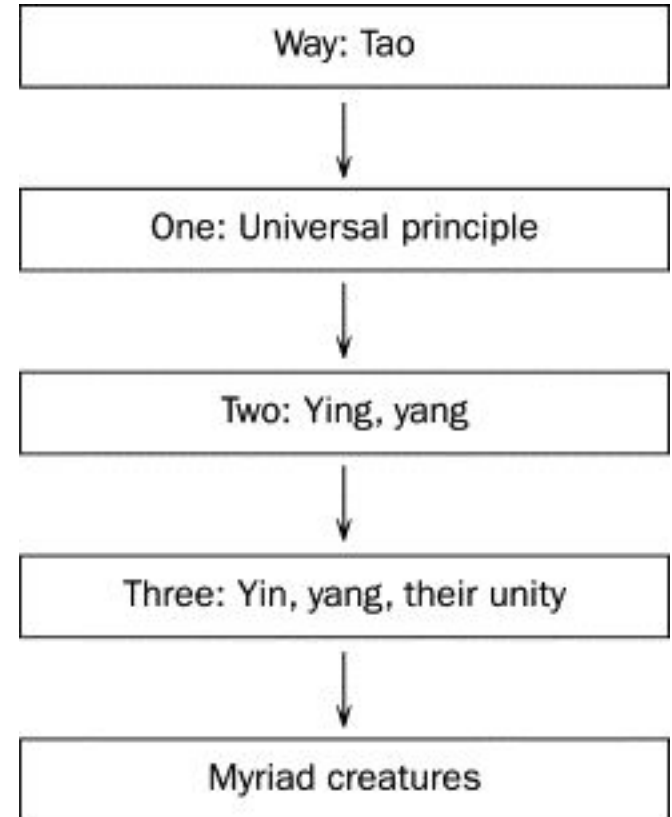
And so,

Sometimes diminishing a thing adds to it;

Sometimes adding to a thing diminishes it.

What others teach, I too teach: “The violent and overbearing will not die a natural death.”

I shall take this as the father of all my teachings.





What is the “Way” in the Laozi?



Chapter 52

The world had a beginning;
This can be considered the mother of the world.
Knowing the mother, return and know her children;
Knowing her children, return and preserve their mother;
And you will avoid danger to the end of your days.
Stop up the openings;
Close the gates;
To the end of your life you will remain unperturbed. Unstop the openings;
Multiply your activities;
And to the end of your life you will be beyond salvation. To discern the minute is called
“enlightenment.”
To preserve the weak is called “strength.”
Use this light and return home to this enlightenment. Do not bring disaster upon yourself.
This is called “practicing the constant.”



What is the “Way” in the Laozi?

Chapter 11

Thirty spokes are joined in the hub of a wheel.

But only by relying on what is not there do we have the 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.



What is the political vision of the *Laozi*?



Chapter 5

Heaven and earth are not benevolent;

They treat the myriad creatures as **straw dogs**.

Sages are not benevolent;

They treat the people as straw dogs.

Is not the space between Heaven and earth like a bellows? Empty yet inexhaustible!

Work it and more will come forth.

An excess of speech will lead to exhaustion,

It is better to hold on to **the mean**.



What is the political vision of the *Laozi*?



Chapter 17

The greatest of rulers is but a shadowy presence;

Next is the ruler who is loved and praised;

Next is the one who is feared;

Next is the one who is reviled.

Those lacking in trust are not trusted.

But [the greatest rulers] are cautious and honor words.

When their task is done and work complete,

Their people all say, “This is just how we are.”



What is the political vision of the *Laozi*?



Chapter 65

In ancient times, those good at practicing the Way did not use it to enlighten the people, but rather to keep them in the dark.

The people are hard to govern because they know too much.

And so,

To rule a state with knowledge is to be a detriment to the state.

Not to rule a state through knowledge is to be a blessing to the state.

Know that these two provide the standard.

Always to know this standard is called Enigmatic Virtue.

How profound and far-reaching is Enigmatic Virtue!

It turns back with things;

And only then is there the Great Compliance.



What is the political vision of the *Laozi*?



Chapter 66

The rivers and ocean are able to rule over a hundred valleys, because they are good at placing themselves in the lower position.

And so, they are able to rule over a hundred valleys.

This is why if you want to be above the people, you must proclaim that you are below them.

If you want to lead the people, you must put yourself behind them.

This is how sages are able to reside above the people without being considered a burden,

How they are able to be out in front of the people without being regarded as a harm.

This is why the whole world delights in supporting them and never wearies. Because they do not contend, no one in the world can contend with them.





What's Laozi's notion of weakness?

Chapter 76

When alive human beings are supple and weak;
When dead they are stiff and strong.
When alive the myriad creatures, plants, and trees are supple and weak;
When dead they are withered and dry.
And so,
 The stiff and the strong are the disciples of death;
 The supple and weak are the disciples of life.
This is why,
 A weapon that is too strong will not prove victorious;
 A tree that is too strong will break.
The strong and the mighty reside down below;
The soft and the supple reside on top.



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What's Laozi's notion of weakness?



Chapter 78

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 so, 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. This is why sages say,

Those who can take on the disgrace of the state
Are called lords of **the altar to the soil and grain**.

Those who can take on the misfortune of the state,
Are called kings of all the world.

Straightforward words seem paradoxical.

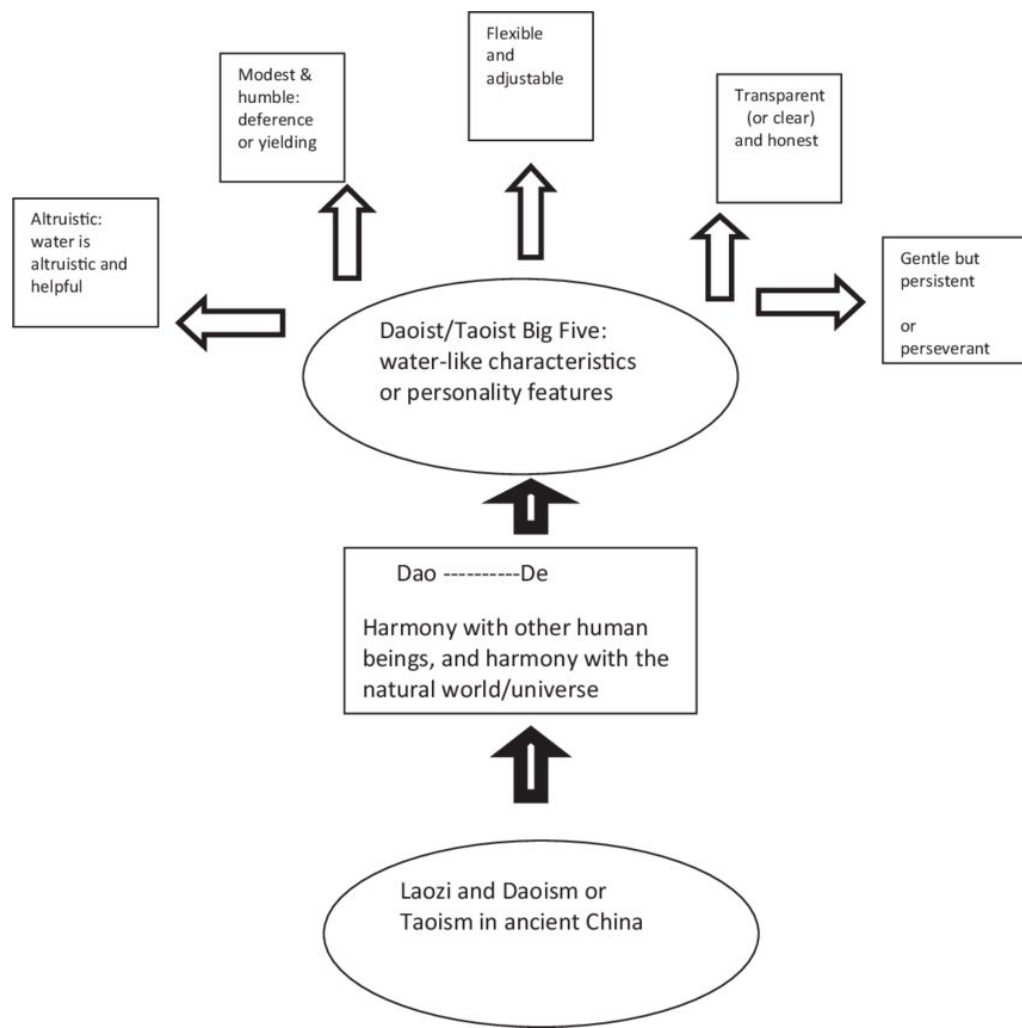


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Textual style



- How would you describe the literary style of the Laozi?
- How does it compare with the styles used in previous texts we have read?





Post a reflection on Ed

- Prompt: Apply **one** concept from the *Daodejing* to a real-world scenario and share your thoughts. You may either agree or disagree with Laozi's ideas.
- Post it on Ed Discussion under “Sections” and “Week 6 Daodejing”
- Submit the link of your post under Assignment
- If you can't finish it by the end of the section, please finish it by the end of the day.