

Tao of Strategy

Study Guide: The *Laozi Daodejing*

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February 12, 2010

Topics

In the second part of the course we focus on three broad topics:

- The *Daodejing*, one of the key texts of early Chinese philosophy; we are interested in the historical context, the general philosophical approach, and certain key concepts, most of which are carried forward from the first part of the course (*The Way of Water*).
- Parallels between the cognition-emotion connection in early Daoist philosophy and contemporary Western neuroscience; it appears that Western neuroscience is rediscovering some of the wisdom found in the *Daodejing* regarding this connection.
- Early Chinese texts such as the *Laozi Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* are not only philosophical but pedagogical; they advocate (and illustrate) a form of intuitive expertise that is also being rediscovered in the West by some cognitive psychologists.

Readings

- Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall. *Daodejing: "Making this life significant"—A philosophical translation*. Ballantine Books, New York, 2003.
- Alan Fox. Reflex and reflectivity: *Wuwei* in the *Zhuangzi*. In Scott Cook, editor, *Hiding the world in the world: Uneven discourse on the Zhuangzi*, pages 207–25. State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 2003.
- Jeremy R. Gray. Integration of emotion and cognitive control. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13(2):46–48, 2009.

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- Daniel Kahneman and Gary Klein. Conditions for intuitive expertise: A failure to disagree. *American Psychologist*, 64(6):515–526, 2009.

Outline

Historical Introduction (*Daodejing*)

- Warring States Period
- Oral tradition of the *Laozi Daodejing* (including songs)
- Authorship of the *Laozi Daodejing*
- Coherence of the *Laozi Daodejing* (on many levels)

Philosophical Introduction (*Daodejing*)

- Optimizing Experience: *This Focus and Its Field*
- Daoist Cosmology: An Interpretive Context
- Getting the Most Out of One’s Ingredients
- Appreciating the Particular
- The Mutual Entailing of Opposites
- Aesthetic Harmony
- Awareness
- The *Wu*-Forms
- The *Wu*-Forms as “Habit-Forming”

Glossary of Key Terms (*Daodejing*)

- *dao* (道), *de* (德)
- *jing* (精), *ming* (明), *xin* (心)
- *qi* (氣)
- *tian* (天), *di* (地), *wan wu* (萬物)
- *wuwei* (無為), *ziran* (自然)

Thematic Index (*Daodejing*)

You should read all eighty-one passages of the *Laozi Daodejing* at least once (and if possible, using more than one translation), but study (for part two of the course) the passages and commentary associated with the following themes:

- Acuity (*ming*)
- Equilibrium (*jing*)
- Insistent particularity/potency/character (*de*)
- Spontaneity (*ziran*)
- *Tian*, the way of
- Unworked wood [an important Daoist metaphor]
- Water
- Wordless teaching
- *Wuwei*

We will pick up some of the remaining themes for part three of the *Tao of Strategy*.

Reflex and Reflectivity

- Introduction
 - “Hinge of *Dao*” (a *Daoist* metaphor)
 - Effortlessness, responsiveness, and unobtrusiveness
- Reflex and Reflectivity: Finding the Fit
 - Cook Ding
 - *shi* (適), *ziran* (自然), *wuwei* (無為)
- The Hinge of *Dao*
 - The Fish Trap
 - *ming* (明), *jing* (精), *shi* (適)
 - *taiji* (太極), *taijiquan* (太極拳)
- Conclusion
 - Freedom, spontaneity, and fit
 - “perfectly well-adjusted person” (a *Daoist* ideal?)

Integration of Emotion and Cognitive Control

- What is Integration?
- Why Should Emotion and Cognitive Control be Integrated?
- Evidence for Integration of Emotion and Cognitive Control
- Future Directions

Conditions for Intuitive Expertise

- Two Perspectives
 - Origins of the Naturalistic Decision Making Approach
 - Origins of the Heuristics and Biases Approach
- Contrasts Between the Naturalistic Decision Making and Heuristics and Biases Approach
 - Stance Regarding Expertise and Decision Algorithms
 - Field vs Laboratory
 - The Definition of Expertise
- Sources of Intuition
 - Skilled Intuition as Recognition
 - Imperfect Intuition
 - Professional Intuitions
 - Augmenting Professional Judgment: The Use of Algorithms
- Conclusions
 - Origins of intuitive judgments matter
 - Subjective confidence and the validity of intuitive judgments
 - Environmental regularities and the validity of intuitive judgments
 - Environmental uncertainty and the validity of intuitive judgments
 - Conditions for the development of skilled intuitions
 - Overconfidence and the illusion of skill
 - Overconfidence and the fractionation of skill
 - Algorithms and low-validity environments

Appendix

Cook Ding and the Development of Intuitive Expertise

In Part II of the course we encounter the two core texts of classical Daoist philosophy: the *Laozi Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. Whereas we will read most or all of the *Laozi Daodejing*, we read only a few parts of the *Zhuangzi*. I reproduce the first of these here, in this Appendix, using Watson's (2003) fine translation. This segment of the *Zhuangzi* is the well-known passage where Cook Ding instructs King Hui of Wei on the acquisition of skill (i.e., intuitive expertise). Before reproducing the translation itself, I list two relevant sources:

- William A. Callahan. Cook Ding's life on the whetstone: Contingency, action, and inertia in the *Zhuangzi*. In Roger T. Ames, editor, *Wandering at ease in the Zhuangzi*, pages 175–95. State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1998
- Burton Watson. *Zhuangzi: Basic writings*. Columbia University Press, New York, 2003

And now here is the translation. As you read this passage, take notice of the similarities between Cook Ding's knife and water, and also of the distinction between intuitive action (emphasizing subconscious processing) and deliberate action (emphasizing conscious processing). This passage appears in the section on "The Secret of Caring for Life" (Watson, 2003, pp. 45–7).

Cook Ding was cutting up an ox for Lord Wenhui. At every touch of his hand, every heave of his shoulder, every move his feet, every thrust of his knee—zip! zoop! He slithered the knife along with a zing, and all was in perfect rhythm, as though he were performing the dance of the Mulberry Grove or keeping time to the Jingshou music.

"Ah, this is marvelous!" said Lord Wenhui. "Imagine skill reaching such heights!"

Cook Ding laid down his knife and replied, "What I care about is the Way, which goes beyond skill. When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years I no longer saw the whole ox. And now—now I go at it by spirit and don't look with my eyes. Perception and understanding have come to a stop and spirit moves where it wants. I go along with the natural makeup, strike in the big hollows, guide the knife through the big openings, and follow things as they are. So I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint."

"A good cook changes the knife once a year—because he cuts. A mediocre cook changes his knife once a month—because he hacks. I've had this knife of mine for nineteen years and I've cut up thousands of oxen with it, and yet the blade is as good as though it had

just come from the grindstone. There are spaces between the joints, and the blade of the knife has really no thickness. If you insert what has no thickness into such spaces, then there's plenty of room—more than enough for the blade to play about in. That's why after nineteen years the blade of my knife is still as good as when it first came from the grindstone.”

“However, whenever I come to a complicated place, I size up the difficulties, tell myself to watch out and be careful, keep my eyes on what I am doing, work very slowly, and move the knife with the greatest subtlety, until—flop! the whole thing comes apart like a clod of earth crumbling to the ground. I stand there holding the knife and look all around me, completely satisfied and reluctant to move on, and then I wipe off the knife and put it away.”

“Excellent!” said Lord Wenhui. “I have heard the words of Cook Ding and learned how to care for life!”

