

## Introduction to Taoist Philosophy

---

<b>Start date</b>	20 May 2016	<b>End date</b>	22 May 2016
<b>Venue</b>	Madingley Hall Madingley Cambridge		
<b>Tutor</b>	Dr James Giles	<b>Course code</b>	1516NRX081

**Director of Programmes** Emma Jennings  
**For further information on this course, please contact** Public Programme Co-ordinator, Clare Kerr  
[clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk) or 01223 746237

**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

---

### Tutor biography

James Giles studied at the University of British Columbia and the University of Edinburgh. He is Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Roskilde University, Denmark and has also taught at other universities in Australia, the US, Canada, Europe, and in Social Anthropology and Philosophy at the University of Cambridge. He has travelled widely through India, China, South-East Asia, and the Pacific. The overarching purpose of Giles' work is to create a philosophical psychology that explains the core features of the human condition. The unifying theme in his work is the fundamental role that human awareness, in its diverse modes, plays in that condition. Among Giles' writings are: *Sexual Attraction: The Psychology of Allure*, *The Nature of Sexual Desire*, *No Self to be Found: The Search for Personal Identity, A Study in Phenomenalism*, and *The Shell of When* (a poetry collection). He is currently working on two books: one on the psychology of infancy and one on Taoist philosophy.

Dr Giles teaches through a combination of lectures and class discussion. His courses are frequently historically based, but always with the primary focus of having students arrive at a philosophical understanding of the subject. For more information visit [www.james-giles.com](http://www.james-giles.com).

---

## Course programme

---

### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
20:30 – 22:00	Intellectual background: Confucianism and Chinese philosophy
22:00	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Lao-tzu and the Tao
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Lao-tzu, returning to the source, and non-activity
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	Yang Chu: Natural leanings without hindrance
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	Lieh-tzu: Like a dead leaf blown away
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	Chuang-tzu and the equality of all things and opinions
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Neo-Taoism and the way to Zen
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

**Aims:**

1. To give students an appreciation of the basic principles of Taoist philosophy.
2. To give students an understanding of the historical development of Taoist philosophy and its relation to Chinese philosophy.
3. To help students develop their own philosophical perspective on the various philosophical issues which philosophical Taoism deals with.

**Content:**

Taoism is an ancient Chinese school of thought that involves many aspects, including both a religious and philosophical view of the nature of human existence. It is the philosophical aspect of Taoism that will be basis for this introductory course.

Starting with Confucius and the development of his ideas in other early schools of philosophy, the course will proceed to the first Taoist philosopher, Lao-tzu (born 604BC). In his writings are the three basic and interrelated principles of the Tao or Way, returning to the source, and non-action.

We will then move on to Yang Chu and see how he attacked Confucianism by emphasizing the value of living a free and happy life over social concerns.

In the further work of Lieh-tzu, Lao-tzu's Taoist concepts become expressed in terms of natural simplicity. For Lieh-tzu, acting in terms of natural simplicity is the way to achieve perfect integrity and full liberty.

Taoist ideas were carried in another direction by Chuang-tzu who tried to express the idea of the Tao in arguments based on stories and parables. A central idea in Chuang-tzu's writings is his notion of the equality of all things and opinions. Here Chuang-tzu argues that to see the world as it really is, we must remove ourselves from the human perspective. To do this we must achieve what he calls non-activity-naturalness.

The course will end by examining the ideas of Neo-Taoist thinkers and seeing how these helped to usher in Zen Buddhist thought.

Although this is a course in Taoism, it is also a course in philosophy. Consequently, although we will be trying to understand the ideas of Taoist thinkers, we will also be trying both to understand the philosophical issues with which Taoism is concerned, and also to appraise the Taoist response to these issues. Only by doing so can we hope to appreciate the full import of Taoist philosophy. Philosophical discussion will thus be an important part of this course.

(This is a rough guide to how the course will proceed. The course may not exactly follow this progression)

**Presentation of the course:**

The teaching methods will involve lectures, class discussion, and a video presentation.

**Outcomes:**

**As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:**

1. Understand the nature of Taoist philosophy;
2. Understand the relation of Taoist thought to philosophical thought generally;
3. Philosophically evaluate Taoist ideas;
4. See a relation between the Taoist philosophy and their own philosophical concerns.

---

## Reading and resources list

---

Although it is not a requirement, since we will be discussing various passages in Taoist texts it would be helpful if students brought the following book with them:

James Legge, *The Texts of Taoism*, volume 1, Dover 1981. ISBN 978-0486209906. This book can be easily ordered from any book shop or from [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk)"

---

Author	Title	Publisher and date
<b>Primary reading</b>		
James Legge (translator),	<i>The Texts of Taoism</i> , volume 1	Dover, 1981
James Legge (translator)	<i>The Texts of Taoism</i> , volume 2	Dover, 1981
Lieh-tzu	<i>The Treatise of the Transcendent Master of the Void</i>	Llanerch, 1992
Lieh-tzu	A Taoist Guide to Practical Living	Shambhala, 2001
<b>Secondary reading</b>		
Holmes Welch	<i>Taoism: The Parting of the Way</i> , revised edition	Beacon, 1971
David Hong Cheng	<i>On Lao-tzu</i>	Wadsworth, 2000
Hyun Hochmann	<i>On Chuang-tzu</i> ,	Wadsworth, 2000

Note: The ideas of Yang Chu are contained in Chapter 7 of Lieh-tzu and at various places in the writings of Chuang-tzu (Legge's vols 1 and 2).

When doing literature searches it should also be noted that there are different ways of transliterating Chinese names and terms. Thus, for example, "Taoism" is also written "Daoism", "Lao tzu" is also written "Laozi", "Lieh tzu" is also written "Liehzi" and "Chuang tzu" is also written "Zhaungzi".

## Website addresses

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/taoism/>

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/daoism/>

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/tao/>

**Note** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*Information correct as of:* 21 April 2016