

Response to Question on Oriental Philosophy

Dr. Grams - MLA - 520

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Question selected : What have I learned from this course?

This course has provided me with a valuable key to unlocking the Orient. Although still just a tourist in a foreign country, I now have a road map and some vocabulary. I have been missing out on so much for years!

I had a roommate once who was Taiwanese and, like me, was living in Vienna, Austria. She didn't know English and I certainly didn't know Chinese, so we had to do our best to communicate in German. We both remained friendly but frustrated after months together, each of us trying to figure out what the other person was thinking or saying.

If I had known more about Confucianism then, I might have understood why there was such a gulf between us. She must have been constantly disappointed that I did not practice any of the social conventions she knew, and I was peeved that she was so unwilling to try new things. I do have a deeper respect for the sort of social order that Confucius recommended. I think American culture suffers now from a lack of or a confusion about etiquette. Perhaps the pendulum will start to swing the other way.

I had a Chinese student in my ESL (English as a Second Language) class in Roanoke, Virginia. When I asked him about his religion he looked puzzled and then tried to explain. He was a Confucian, but also a Buddhist. Then he added Taoism to his list. I wondered why he couldn't make up his mind. Now I realize that he, and many other Chinese, incorporate several religions or philosophies into their day-to-day lives. What a contrast to the Americans! So often we are like hypocrites, for we loudly proclaim our

