

BBC Radio 4 In Our Time

Daoism

Melvyn Bragg and his guests discuss Daoism. An ancient Chinese tradition of philosophy and religious belief, Daoism first appeared more than two thousand years ago. For centuries it was the most popular religion in China; in the West its religious aspects are not as well-known as its practices, which include meditation and Feng Shui, and for its most celebrated text, the Dao De Jing. The central aim in Daoism is to follow the 'Dao', a word which roughly translates as 'The Way'. Daoists believe in following life in its natural flow, what they refer to as an 'effortless action'. This transcendence can be linked to Buddhism, the Indian religion that came to China in the 2nd century BC and influenced Daoism - an exchange which went both ways. Daoism is closely related to, but has also at times conflicted with, the religion of the Chinese Imperial court, Confucianism. The spirit world is of great significance in Daoism, and its hierarchy and power often take precedence over events and people in real life. But how did this ancient and complex religion come to be so influential? With: Tim Barrett Professor of East Asian History at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, Martin Palmer, Director of the International Consultancy on Religion, Education and Culture, Hilde De Weerd, Fellow and Tutor in Chinese History at Pembroke College, University of Oxford Producer: Natalia Fernandez.

Stoicism

Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss Stoicism, the third great philosophy of the Ancient World. It was founded by Zeno in the fourth century BC and flourished in Greece and then in Rome. Its ideals of inner solitude, forbearance in adversity and the acceptance of fate won many brilliant adherents and made it the dominant philosophy across the whole of the Ancient World. The ex-slave Epictetus said "Man is troubled not by events, but by the meaning he gives them". Seneca, the politician, declared that "Life without the courage for death is slavery". The stoic thoughts of Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher emperor, provided a rallying point for empire builders into the modern age. Stoicism

influenced the Christian church, had a big effect on Shakespeare and Renaissance drama and may even have given the British their 'stiff upper lip', but it's a philosophy that was almost forgotten in the 20th century. Does it still have a legacy for us today? With Angie Hobbs, Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Warwick; Jonathan Rée, philosopher and historian; David Sedley, Laurence Professor of Ancient Philosophy, University of Cambridge.

Seneca the Younger

Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss Seneca the Younger, who was one of the first great writers to live his entire life in the world of the new Roman empire after the fall of the Republic. He was a Stoic philosopher, he wrote blood-soaked tragedies, he was an orator, and he navigated his way through the reigns of Caligula, Claudius and Nero, sometimes exercising power at the highest level and at others spending years in exile. Agrippina the Younger was the one who called for him to tutor Nero, and it is thought Seneca helped curb some of Nero's excesses. He was later revered within the Christian church, partly for what he did and partly for what he was said to have done in forged letters to St Paul. His tragedies, with their ghosts and high body count, influenced Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*, and Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. The image above is the so-called bust of Seneca, a detail from *Four Philosophers* by Peter Paul Rubens.

With

Mary Beard

Professor of Classics at the University of Cambridge

Catharine Edwards

Professor of Classics and Ancient History at Birkbeck, University of London

and

Alessandro Schiesaro

Professor of Classics at the University of Manchester

Producer: Simon Tillotson.

Chinese Legalism

Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss the origins and rise of Legalism in China, from the start of the Warring States Period (c475 - 221 BC) to the time of The First Emperor Qin Shi Huang (pictured), down to Chairman Mao and the present day. Advanced by the Qin statesman Shang Yang and later blended together by Han Fei, the three main aspects of Legalism were the firm implementation of laws, use of techniques such as responsibility and inscrutability, and taking advantage of the ruler's position. The Han dynasty that replaced the Qin discredited this philosophy for its apparent authoritarianism, but its influence continued, re-emerging throughout Chinese history.

With

Frances Wood

Former Curator of the Chinese Collections at the British Library

Hilde de Weerd

Professor of Chinese History at Leiden University

And

Roel Sterckx

Joseph Needham Professor of Chinese History at the University of Cambridge.

Producer: Simon Tillotson.

The Ego

We hear a lot about ego today. Whether it's in association with Presidents or Chief Execs, in relation to social media or celebrity, ego appears to be everywhere. But is it a problem? Ego is Latin for "I" so clearly we can't escape it. For Freud the Ego plays a moderating role. Yet today we refer to the Ego in a

negative sense. "That's your Ego talking" or "the Ego has landed." So what is the Ego and can religion help us to understand our relationship to it?

In the final episode of this series of Beyond Belief, Ernie Rea is joined by Ajmal Masroor, a Bangladeshi born British Imam, the Reverend Lucy Winkett, Rector of St James' Church Piccadilly and Dav Panesar, a Sikh who has carried out pioneering work on mindfulness and contemplative based health interventions in the UK.

Producer:

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Series Producer:

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