



*James Barnett Lecture Series in  
Humanistic Anthropology*

Presents

**EDWARD SLINGERLAND**

University of British Columbia

April 21, 2015

4:00-5:30 pm

The Humanities Institute, Austin Bldg, Rm 301

# Trying Not to Try: Trust and the Paradox of Spontaneity

Many early Chinese thinkers had as their spiritual ideal the state of *wu-wei*, or effortless action. By advocating spontaneity as an explicit moral and religious goal, they inevitably involved themselves in the paradox of *wu-wei*—the problem of how one can try not to try—which later became one of the central tensions in East Asian religious thought. In this talk, I will look at the paradox from both an early Chinese and a contemporary perspective, drawing upon work in social psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and evolutionary theory to argue that this paradox is a real one, and is moreover intimately tied up with problems surrounding cooperation in large-scale societies and concerns about moral hypocrisy.

*Co-sponsored by: Humanities Institute, Department of Anthropology,  
Asian and Asian American Studies Institute, Department of Philosophy,  
James Barnett Endowment for Humanistic Anthropology*

**PLEASE RSVP to [uchi@uconn.edu](mailto:uchi@uconn.edu) or 860-486-9057**

For more information please contact Richard Sosis ([richard.sosis@uconn.edu](mailto:richard.sosis@uconn.edu)).