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or by appointment

Philosophy 381: Confucian Tradition

Spring 2010 Syllabus

Confucius is probably the most influential philosopher ever to live, if we measure influence by the number of people whose lives have been deeply shaped by his ideas. His ideas were further expounded and developed by Mencius (Mengzi) and Xunzi in the classical period, and by a number of later figures in medieval and early modern times. Confucian texts were central to the studies of almost every educated person in China for centuries and were very influential in most of east Asia. After many years of suppression under Mao Zedong, the Confucian tradition seems poised to again become a major source of guidance for the Chinese people as they strive to address the challenges of the twenty-first century.

In this course we will explore in depth the classical sources of the Confucian philosophical tradition, and more selectively the contributions of later figures. In the early part of the course, we will read the writings of Confucius (孔子, 5th century B.C.) and Mencius (孟子, 4th century B.C.) together, examining how Mencius expounds and extends the work of Confucius. Next we will turn to Xunzi (荀子, 3rd century B.C.) and explore how he deepens and systematizes some central elements of the Confucian view while disagreeing substantially with his predecessors on others. Finally we will make selected comparisons with the thought of the Neo-Confucian Wang Yangming (王陽明, 1472-1529) and the ancient Greek Aristotle (4th century B.C.). Our study will be guided in part by contemporary scholarship, and by comparison with Western virtue ethics.

Throughout the course we will endeavor to understand Confucian thought, but also consider how far Confucian thought can help us to understand ourselves and our world. I find the Confucians extremely insightful and relevant, and believe they have much to contribute to contemporary discussions of ethics, particularly those centered on a notion of character or virtue. Questions we will consider include: Are humans naturally good? What is the proper role of desire and emotion in ethical life? What is the authority of tradition? How do social norms shape our character? Is Confucianism elitist, and is this a problem? Should particular relationships or abstract principles take priority in our ethical decisions? How deep are the similarities between Western and Confucian conceptions of the virtues? What can Western moral philosophy learn from Confucian thought? The course is designed for students with some prior experience studying philosophy and some prior exposure to Confucian thought in particular (e.g. in Phil 220 or Phil 212).

Assignments and grading

Students will be expected to read carefully and will be graded on class participation, two shorter papers (5 pages), one longer paper (10-12 pages), a midterm and a final exam.

Reading and Participation: The small size of the class will allow for especially rich discussion. Read the material listed for each meeting carefully before class. The reading assignments are not

especially long, but they are dense. You should plan to spend about an hour and a half reading for each class meeting. You will need to read most of our texts more than once to understand them well. Read with a pencil or pen in your hand, to mark passages you find interesting, puzzling, or remarkable. Plan to bring up in class passages and ideas you found noteworthy in the reading. Bring questions and comments that show you have given the texts careful thought.

Because you are formulating your own paper topics, I encourage you to start thinking about topics you might like to write on from the very start of the course. Each day as you read for class, and as we discuss the readings, be thinking about which of the ideas we touch on might make an interesting topic for a paper, and feel free to run topics by me as they occur to you. You don't have to wait until the listed deadlines to formulate a paper topic, or turn in a paper. The idea is for you to use the assignments to explore the topics that appeal to you, so seize the day!

Papers: Essays are academically the most important parts of the course, because in them you will develop your thinking in the greatest depth. In your essays you have the opportunity to make your most serious contributions to the philosophical conversation we are pursuing, because you have the time to develop and revise your thoughts carefully on a specific topic. Essays will require you to engage critically with the course texts and their topics. You will examine and assess the reasoning and evidence in favor of the ideas in our texts, and you will articulate and support your own judgment.

Papers should engage both the *claims* and the *reasoning* of the course texts, and present *reasoning of your own* in support of a *clear and specific thesis*. Students are to formulate their own paper topics and for each paper submit a paragraph describing the topic for approval prior to writing the paper. The description should make it clear how the paper will meet the criteria just mentioned. I may require a student to meet with me before approving the paper topic. Paper topics are due *by 5pm* on the due dates listed on the course syllabus and may be submitted either electronically or in hard copy. I will not accept a paper unless the topic has been approved in advance. If the topic is submitted late or does not show a serious effort, I may penalize the paper one grade step (e.g. B to B-), or two steps in case of both problems.

To strengthen student writing and deepen engagement with the issues, students will be required to submit a draft of the longer paper well in advance, for feedback and a grade. This draft should be at least 8 pages in length and should reflect as far as possible the scope, claims, and reasoning of the final paper.

Essays are due at the beginning of class on the specified day. Essays are to be turned in in hard copy. If special circumstances prevent you bringing a hard copy by the start of class, essays I receive by email attachment in a standard format (RTF, PDF, Word) by the start of class will count as having been turned in on time, but you should bring me a hard copy at your first reasonable opportunity. I will not grade a paper without a hard copy. Late essays will receive a penalty of one grade step (e.g. B to B-), and one additional step for each additional day late. Thus, a paper turned in after class on the due date will be penalized one step; a paper turned in the following day will be penalized an additional step.

Exams: Exams test both comprehension of the course texts and your ability to think critically about the texts and their themes. You will need to be able to explain key ideas from our reading in your own words, to show how they fit together, and to use them intelligently in new ways. Exams will include both short answer and essay questions. You will also need to be able to interpret passages from our texts intelligently during the exam. I will distribute a study sheet including sample exam questions in advance. However, the best way to prepare for the exams will be to read carefully, participate actively in class, and re-read in light of the discussion.

This is a 300-level course. Work for this course will be graded according to a higher set of expectations than work for 200-level courses.

Grading Breakdown

<i>Area</i>	<i>Percentage of grade</i>
Class participation	15%
2 shorter essays (about 5 pages each)	25% (12.5% each)
1 longer essay (10-12 pages)	25% (draft 8%)
Midterm exam	15%
Final Exam	20%

Course texts

Confucius, *Analects*, trans. Simon Leys New York: .W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.

Mencius, *Mencius*, trans. D.C. Lau. New York: Penguin, 2003.

other readings to be distributed

(possible: Xunzi, *Xunzi*, trans. Burton Watson. New York: Columbia UP, 2003.)

While other editions of these works exist, I recommend using these editions to make it easier for us to work together as a class, as well as because they are excellent editions. However, if you are interested in consulting *additional* translations for comparison, I particularly recommend the Ames and Rosemont translation of the *Analects*, and/or the Slingerland translation (Hackett).

Communicating with me

I will hold office hours Monday through Thursday afternoons. You are welcome to come and talk with me about the course material and assignments at these times, or make an appointment with me for another time.

Email is a wonderful technology, but it has limitations. You are welcome to email me with questions that can be answered simply. I will usually respond within 24 hours, not counting weekends. For more complex matters, however, it will usually be more effective to speak on the phone or in person. I will occasionally send information about the class by email. Please do check your email regularly.

Academic Integrity

You, your classmates and I will be investing a substantial amount of work, thought, and energy into this course. There are few things more valuable than learning, and we are embarked on a process of learning together. Plagiarism or any other violation of academic integrity is a serious breach of the trust of your classmates and me and undermines our common project, the purposes of the course, and the point of education. If you are tempted to cheat, you need to rethink why you are in college. If you are in a bind, have the self-respect to turn in weak work rather than work that is not your own. If you turn in work that is not your own, it is likely that you will fail the course. It is your responsibility to understand the College's Code of Academic Integrity and to follow it. If you have any questions about how the Code applies to your work in this course, ask me.

Projected Course Schedule (subject to change)

Feb	9	T	Introduction	
	11	H	<i>Mencius</i> IA-B, Intro. vii-ix; <i>Analects</i> 12 + 2.3, 16.1-3 + Intro. “Who Was Confucius?” <i>xx-xxiv</i>	
	16	T	<i>Mencius</i> IIA-B, <i>Analects</i> 13-14 + 1.16, 3.11, 6.15, 8.13, 11.13, 12.4, 15.15, 18.8, 19.1	
	18	H	X. Jiang, “Mencius on Human Nature and Courage”	
	23	T	<i>Mencius</i> VIA-B, <i>Analects</i> 4, 15 + 1.7, 1.15, 2.4, 5.26, 6.18, 7.19, 15.9, 16.5	
	25	H	Graham, “The Background of the Mengzian Theory of Human Nature”	T1
Mar	1	T	<i>Mencius</i> IVA-B, <i>Analects</i> 1-2, 17 + 9.3, 12.15, 15.33; reread <i>Mencius</i> 6B14 with <i>Analects</i> 2.12, 5.4, 6.9, 6.16, 6.25, 7.12, 15.32, 17.1	
	4	H	<i>Mencius</i> VA-B, <i>Analects</i> 3, 5-6	
	9	T	Tu Weiming, “The Creative Tension between Jên and Li” Shun, “Jen and Li in the Analects”	P1
	11	H	Li, “Li as Cultural Grammar: On the Relation Between Li and Ren in Confucius’ Analects”	
	16	T	Guo Qiyong, “Is Confucian Ethics a ‘Consanguinism?’” Huff, “Filiality and the Scope of Benevolence in Mencius”	
	18	H	<i>midterm exam</i>	M
			<i>Spring Break</i>	
	30	T	<i>Mencius</i> IIIA-B, <i>Analects</i> 7, 9-11	
Apr	1	H	<i>Mencius</i> VIIA-B, <i>Analects</i> 8, 16, 18-20 + 3.11, 7.16, 7.19, 11.26, 14.38, 15.2	T2
	6	T	Xunzi I	
	8	H	D. C. Lau, “Theories of Human Nature in Mencius and Xunzi.”	
	13	T	Hutton, “Does Xunzi Have a Consistent Theory of Human Nature?” Xunzi II	P2
	15	H	Ivanhoe, “Heaven as a Source for Ethical Warrant in Early Confucianism” Xunzi III	
	20	T	Wong, “Xunzi on Moral Motivation,” Yu, “The highest good and external goods”	T3
	22	H	Irwin, “Permanent Happiness”, Wang Yangming selections I	
	27	T	Wang Yangming selections II	
	29	H	Angle, “Sagely Ease”	D
May	4	T	Yu, <i>Mirrors of Virtue</i> , selections Huff, “Happiness as the Target of Life in Aristotle and Wang Yangming”	
	6	H	Sim, <i>Remastering Morals with Confucius and Aristotle</i> , selections	
	11	T	<i>Review and Reflection</i>	P3
	13	H	<i>Review and Reflection</i> <i>Final Exam—Thursday, May 20th, 8:30-11:30am</i>	

(T1, 2, etc.—paper topic due; P1, 2, etc.—paper due; M—midterm exam; D—draft due)