

Omar Fakhri

Chinese Philosophy

Course Description

This is an upper-division class on Chinese philosophy. The course will focus on key concepts in Chinese thought, such as: the relation between ritual/rites (Li) and morality (Yi), whether human nature (xing) is initially good or bad, what is enlightenment (ming*), among others. We begin by looking at the Confucian tradition. Here we will see a close connection between human flourishing and the importance of following rituals and rites. Then we will move to the critics of the Confucian tradition, Mozi and Yangzhu. The essence of their criticism is that rituals and rites are unnecessary. Rather, they claim, we must focus on what is right. For a response, we will look at an important Confucian thinker, Mencius.

From here we will turn to the Daoist tradition, especially the writings of Zhuangzi. We will compare the fictional Confucian that appears in the writings of Zhuangzi with the historical Confucian of the *Analects*, with an eye towards Zhuangzi's notion of forgetting (wang). The next important figure to consider is Xunzi, and how his ideas differ from Mencius and Zhuangzi. In contrast to Mencius, Xunzi claims that human nature is evil. We will see that this slogan-like statement is difficult to decipher, but we will spend some time trying to understand whether, if at all, Xunzi disagrees with Mencius. Although they clearly disagree on the surface, there are some fundamental agreements between the two thinkers. Lastly, we will conclude the course by looking at the Chinese Buddhist tradition. We will look at Hui Neng. This tradition has interesting similarities with the Daoist tradition of Zhuangzi, especially when it comes to the notion of enlightenment and forgetting. We will discuss how these two views are similar and how they are different in subtle but important ways. Although this course will largely consist in reading historical texts, we will turn to a few important contemporary authors to help us understand these difficult historical texts: Kwong-loi Shun, A. C. Graham, David S. Nivison, and Walter T. Stace.

Course Requirements:

- Biweekly Assignments 40% – These are short reaction papers between 400-500 words. You are expected to summarize an important part of the reading and then critically evaluate it.

Pick only **one** of the following requirements (note: for those interested in applying to graduate programs in philosophy, I highly recommend doing the latter option):

- Three Papers 20% each – These are shorter papers, about 5-7 double-spaced pages. Prompts will be handed out a week before the paper is due.

Or

- Long Paper 60% - This is a substantial paper, about 15 double-spaced pages. You will be required to get your paper topic approved by me first. Ideally, you should aim to do this at least a month before the paper is due. This paper will engage with a big bulk of the assigned readings and perhaps some outside sources as well. If you decide to write this paper instead of the three short papers, please let me know as soon as you make this decision. I will provide

extensive comments on this paper, and I would be happy to read future drafts of it, even after the class is done.

Required Text:

Confucius: the Analects

Mencius

Zhuangzi

Xunzi

The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch

The following contemporary readings will be distributed electronically via the course website

Kwong-loi Shun “On the Idea of ‘No Self’”

A.C. Graham (trans.) *Chuang Tzu: The Inner Chapters*

David S. Nivison “Hsun Tzu and Chuang Tzu”

Walter T. Stace “Oriental Conceptions of Detachment and Enlightenment”