

## PHIL 109 – Early Chinese Ethics

*Instructor:* Seth Robertson

*Time:* TuTh 12-1:15 PM

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*Location:* 107 Emerson Hall

*Course Page:*

*Office:* 320 Emerson Hall

<https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/67834>

*Office Hours:* Wednesdays 3-4 PM and by appointment

### Course Description

Early (Pre-Qin era) China was a hotbed of philosophical activity: scholars developed careful and fascinating ethical views in the context of serious philosophical debates between major schools of thought. This course focuses on some of these ethical debates between Confucian, Mohist, Daoist, and Legalist philosophers in early China. We'll read both classical texts such as the Analects of Confucius, Mengzi, Xunzi, Mozi, and Zhuangzi and important contemporary scholarship on these texts. Several moral questions will be of particular importance: What is the relationship between etiquette and morality? What are the most important virtues to acquire? Should we think of morality and moral development as something natural or artificial? Are we justified in caring more about some people (our closest friends and family) than others? We will have a special focus on three important interpretive themes for the course: (1) How can understanding the particular contours of the debates each scholar is engaged in help us understand their overall views? (2) How does each philosopher's view of human psychology and epistemology constrain, guide, and support their moral theorizing? (3) How can an understanding of early Chinese ethical thought, theory, and debate help enrich contemporary discussions in ethics and moral philosophy? No previous experience or coursework in Chinese philosophy is required for this course.

### *Learning Objectives*

1. Develop the ability to construct interpretations of historical philosophical texts.
2. Develop understanding of major debates in Early Chinese ethics and major moral theories therein.
3. Develop the ability to infer ways in which the ideas, claims, and arguments in historical ethical texts are morally relevant for one's own life.

## Texts

*Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. Ed. Ivanhoe and Van Norden. Hackett. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2001. 978-0872207806

Other than primary texts, all Required and Optional and some Further Readings are posted on the course website.

If you wish to purchase or borrow full translations of the primary texts, I suggest:

Analects – *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, tr. Slingerland. Hackett.

Daodejing – *The Way of Lao Tzu*, tr. Wing-tsit Chan. Prentice Hall.

Mengzi – *Mengzi: With Selections From Traditional Commentaries*, tr. Van Norden. Hackett.

Mozi – *The Mozi: A Complete Translation*, tr. Johnston. Chinese University Press.

Xunzi – *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, tr. Hutton. Princeton University Press.

Zhaungzi – *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, tr. Ziporyn. Hackett.

Han Feizi – *Han Feizi: Basic Writings*, tr. Burton Watson. Columbia University Press.

Ban Zhou – *The Confucian Four Books for Women*, tr. Pang-White, Oxford University Press.

## Course Requirements / Grading

1. *Application Essay (Draft: 15%, Final 15%)*. Write a short essay for a popular audience that exposes them to an aspect of early Chinese ethics in an engaging and informed fashion.
  - a. Graduate students may choose instead to write a 6-10 page paper that connects an idea, theory, argument in early Chinese ethics to their own areas of research outside of early Chinese philosophy.
2. *Interpretation Essay (Draft: 20%, Final 20%)*. Write an interpretive essay on any of the major texts for the course. Undergraduate: 5-8 pages, Graduate: 10-13 pages.
3. *Tests (40%; 20% each)*: There will be two take-home essay tests (a midterm and final). These will take the form of textbook chapters.
4. *Participation (10%)*: Scored by completing in-class group activities.

## **Late/Missed Work Policies**

Exams may be rescheduled if the student provides an acceptable excuse but must be taken as soon as possible. In-class activities cannot be made-up, but every student is allowed to miss 2 without penalty.

## **Electronic Devices**

Laptops are not permitted for use in class. Exceptions will be made only where there is some documented need for the device.

## **Academic Integrity**

Students are expected to do their own work. If you violate standards of academic integrity, I will seek to impose the severest penalty the university permits.

## **Statement on Student Success and Reasonable Accommodation**

My hope is that you are able to do your best work in this course to achieve success. There are many resources available here that you should not hesitate to utilize if needed:

<https://advising.college.harvard.edu/academic-support-resources-0>.

Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should contact me personally as soon as possible so that we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation. For more information, please see <https://accessibility.harvard.edu/student-accommodations>.

## **Syllabus Policy**

This syllabus is subject to change. The most updated version of this syllabus will be posted on the course page.

## **Schedule**

**R:** *Required reading*. Will be focus of lecture)

**O:** *Optional*. Might come up in lecture; will be useful for take-home tests and for essays

**F:** *Further*. Further reading if you become interested in particular topic. Might be useful for your essays.

Date	Topic	Reading
1/28	Introduction; Course Overview	R: Concepción, “How to Read Philosophy”
1/30	Cross-cultural Philosophy	R: Olberding, “Other People Die” R: Garfield and Van Norden, “If Philosophy Won’t Diversity, Let’s Call It What It Really Is” O: Kupperman, “Naturalness Revisited” F: Park, <i>Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy</i> F: McLeod, “What Chinese Philosophers Can Teach Us About Dealing With Our Own Grief” F: Olberding & Ivanhoe (eds), <i>Mortality in Traditional Chinese Thought</i> ; Jiang “The Problem of Authorship and the Project of Chinese Philosophy”
2/4	Confucianism: The Analects	R: <i>Analects</i> Books 1-7 (RCCP: 3-24) O: Liu “Confucius in the Analects” F: Olberding, <i>Dao Companion to the Analects</i>
2/6		R: <i>Analects</i> Books 8-14 (RCCP: 24-44) O: <i>Analects</i> Books 15-20 (RCCP: 44-54) F: Cline, “Nameless Virtues and Restrained Speech in the Analects”
2/11		R: Wong “Cultivating the Self in Concert with Others” O: Sarkissian, “Confucius and the Effortless Life of Virtue” F: Novick and Bright “Zhengming”
2/13	Interpretation: Virtue Ethics and Exemplarism	R: Sim, “Why Confucius’ Ethics is a Virtue Ethics” O: Olberding, “Dreaming of the Duke of Zhou: Exemplarism and the <i>Analects</i> ”
2/18	Ritual in the Analects	R: Lai, “Li in the Analects” O: Sarkissian, “Ritual and Rightness in the Analects” F: Robertson, “Nunchi, Ritual, and Early Confucian Ethics”
2/20	Mozi	R: <i>Mozi</i> , “11: Obeying One’s Superior,” “16: Impartial Caring,” “A Condemnation of Aggressive War,” “For

		Moderation in Expenditures” (RCCP: 65-80) O: Liu, “Mozi” F: Graham, “A Radical Reaction: Mo-tzu” (in <i>Disputers of the Dao</i> )
2/25		R: <i>Mozi</i> , “25: For Moderation in Funerals,” “31: On Ghosts,” “35: A Condemnation of Fatalism” (RCCP: 80-90; 94-104; 110-111) F: Defoort and Standaert, <i>The Mozi as an Evolving Text</i>
2/27		R: Loy “On the Argument for Jian’Ai” O: Wong “Universalism vs. Love with Distinctions: An Ancient Debate Revived” O: Park, “Danger of Sound: Mozi’s Criticism of Ritual Music”; Back, "Rethinking Mozi's Jian'ai" F: Loy & Wong, “War and Ghosts in Mozi’s Political Philosophy”
3/3	Confucianism: Mengzi	R: <i>Mengzi</i> 1-3 (RCCP: 117-137)
3/5		R: <i>Mengzi</i> 4-6 (RCCP: 137-151) O: <i>Mengzi</i> 7 (RCCP: 152-157)
3/10		R: Kim “Human Nature and Moral Sprouts: Mencius on the Pollyanna Problem” O: Sung, “The Appearance-Only Hypocrite”
3/12		R: Hutton, “Moral Connoisseurship in the Mengzi” O: Carey & Vitz, “Mencius, Hume, and the Virtue of Humanity” <b>3/13 Midterm Due</b>
Spring Recess		
3/24	Daoism: Laozi / <i>Daodejing</i>	R: <i>Daodejing</i> (RCCP 163-203) F: <i>Dao Companion to Daoist Philosophy</i> ; Liu, “Laozi”
3/26		Slingerland, excerpt from <i>Effortless Action</i> (R: 77-95, O: 95-117) O: Perkins “The <i>Mozi</i> and the <i>Daodejing</i> ” <b>3/27 Application Paper Rough Draft Due</b>
3/31	Daoism: Zhuangzi	R: <i>Zhuangzi</i> 1-7 (RCCP: 208-243)

		O: Van Norden, “Competing Interpretations on the Inner Chapters of the Zhuangzi” F: Schwitzgebel “Zhuangzi’s Attitude Toward Language and His Skepticism”
4/2		R: <i>Zhuangzi</i> 8, 9, 10, 14, 17, 19, 20, 22 (On Canvas) O: Perkins, “Wandering Beyond Tragedy with Zhuangzi”
4/7		R: Fraser, “Skepticism and Value in the Zhuangzi” O: Kidd “Following the Way of Heaven: Exemplarism, Emulation, and Daoism”
4/9		R: Moeller, “Daoist Criticisms of Confucian Sacrificial Rights” O: Fraser, “The Limitations of Ritual Propriety” F: Sommer “Concepts of the Body in the Zhuangzi” <b>4/10 Application Paper Final Draft Due</b>
4/14	Confucianism: Xunzi	R: <i>Xunzi</i> , 1, 2, 21, 22, 23 (RCCP: 256-263;269 F: Hutton, <i>Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Xunzi</i>
4/16		R: <i>Xunzi</i> 19, 23 O: Sung, “Mencius and Xunzi on Xing”
4/21		R: Sung, “Ritual in the Xunzi” O: Tan, “Li and Tian in the Xunzi”
4/23	Legalism: Hanfei	R: <i>Hanfeizi</i> , 5, 7, 12, 43, 49, 50 (RCCP: 314-317; 323-327; 332-359) F: Goldin, <i>Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Han Fei</i> ; DeLapp, “Being Worthy of Persuasion: Political Communication in the Han Feizi” <b>4/24 Interpretation Paper Rough Draft Due</b>
4/28	Daoism(?): Ban Zhao	R: Ban Zhao, <i>Lessons for Women</i> O: Pang-White, Introduction to <i>The Confucian Four Books for Women &amp; Lessons for Women</i> ; APA Newsletter on Feminism and Asian Philosophy F: Pang-White, <i>Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy and Gender</i> <b>4/28 Final Due</b> <b>05/10 Interpretation Paper Final Draft Due</b>