PH 247: INTRODUCTION TO CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

Boston University, Department of Philosophy

Summer (II) 2018

SOC B57, M T Th 9:30a-12:00  
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Office Hours: M 12:30-2:00 and Th 12:30-2:00, STH 502

# DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to Chinese philosophy by way of the classical/ancient period of East Asian thought: the period of ‘Various Masters and Hundred Schools’ (*Zhuzi Baijia* 諸子百家), which spans the Spring and Autumn (770-476 BCE) and Warring States (475-221 BCE) eras of what is now China. Constitutive of this period are the dynamics of what came to be known in East Asian civilization as ‘Masters Texts’ (*zishu* 子書): texts composed by or compiled in the name of various ‘masters’ (*zi* 子). As traces of a purportedly consummate human being’s persona and teaching, these texts are interanimated by various sorts of polemic. The aim of this course is to critically explore and come to learn the sense in which Masters Texts and their internal disputes are *philosophical*. The aim, therefore, is to come to a better understanding of what philosophy is.

Though varying widely in their format and style of presentation, Masters Texts have a shared set of concepts and concerns. One way to illuminate this shared set of concepts and concerns is to read the ancient Masters as basically concerned with the conditions under which words and things make *sense* or are *well-ordered*. That will be the approach of this course.

For the Masters, the ‘well-orderedness’ of things is not the order things have independent of our desires, passions, thoughts, and ways of living—say, the ‘natural order’ as per the natural sciences. Nor are words ‘well-ordered’ whenever merely grammatical or even eloquent. Rather, for things to be well-ordered is for their *coherence* to emerge, for a certain obscurity to dissipate as to how things from seemingly disparate quarters of reality (natural, social, historical, political) hang together. Constitutive of its dissipation is the sense things have once properly *named.* Such is the well-ordering of words. The basic concern of the ancient Masters, then, is not what we ought to want, how we ought to think, how we ought to feel, or how we ought to live. The basic concern is how we ought to *word* and hence acquire vision of the whole in which we find ourselves moved to ask such questions.

This course will treat the preeminent Masters or ‘*zi’*: Kongzi (Confucius), Mozi, Yang Zhu (or Yangzi), Mengzi (Mencius), Laozi, Zhuangzi, Xunzi and Han Feizi. How these ancient philosophers took up the task of naming the order of things will be examined in three units: **humanism** (that the order of things is moral and nameable), **inhumanism/naturalism** (that the order of things is amoral and unnameable), and **standardism** (that the order of things, whether moral or amoral, nameable or unnameable, is an imposition).

# OBJECTIVES

* **Reading**: Our principal aim is not to learn everything that these texts have to say, but to learn *how to read* these texts, and hence how to read philosophy. Your ability to read philosophy and other complex texts will improve.
* **Writing**: Through regular writing assignments, you will learn how to interpret philosophical texts and how to clearly and carefully think through philosophical questions, concepts, and arguments. In this way, you will be compelled to forge your own powers of expression—to find your own voice. Your writing will improve.
* **Speaking**: Relatedly, you will be greatly encouraged to speak and express yourselves to one another. The course is designed so that most of the work happens in the conversations we have each class day, and will succeed to the extent that we have a plurality of engaged perspectives at the table.
* **Global citizenship and intercultural literacy**: ‘Western’ culture and civilization remains the default mode in which universities teach students about themselves and their place in the world. But the West is a myth, and its default status is a failure of the academic imagination. Its default status is also a disservice to an increasingly diverse university-student body and a failure to think properly about our globalized reality. In this course, you will learn to read the philosophers who form the foundation of East Asian intellectual heritage. In the process, you will learn something about the ancient civilization in what is now China. You will also be introduced to a few classical Chinese characters and the basics of pronunciation.

# TEXTS

1. Confucius. *Analects: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Translated by Edward Slingerland. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003. ISBN: 978-0-87220-635-9
2. Mo Zi. *The Book of Master Mo*. Translated by Ian Johnston. Penguin Classics. London: Penguin, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-14-139211-0
3. Hutton, Eric L., trans. *Xunzi: The Complete Text*. Paperback. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-691-16931-6
4. Red Pine, trans. *Lao-Tzu’s Taoteching: With Selected Commentaries from the Past 2,000 Years*. Revised 3rd. Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2009. ISBN: 978-1-61932-087-1
5. Ziporyn, Brook, trans. *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings with Selections from Traditional Commentaries*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009. ISBN: 978-0-87220-911-4
6. Watson, Burton, trans. *Han Feizi: Basic Writings*. Translations from the Asian Classics. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-231-12969-5

# REQUIREMENTS

1. A **critical summary** in preparation for class. (First two ungraded; lowest two dropped. See ‘Schedule’ below.) In ~500 words:
   1. *summarize* an important part of the reading—flag where it falls in the order of the text, expound key concepts and claims (what does it argue?), and any rhetorical and argumentative patterns (how does it argue?)
   2. raise at least one *question*

(Tip: outline the reading first; then write your critical summary.) The critical summaries are designed to help you with the reading, and will be the springboard for our discussions. Hence, they will be collected at the end of each class. Summaries will be graded on a **✓+** (excellent: 10/10), **✓** (adequate: 8.5/10), **✓-** (deficient or late: 7/10), and **N/C** (not deserving of credit: 0/10) basis. What counts as ‘late’? If you have completed the summary but arrive to class more than 10 minutes late without excuse, or if you don’t submit the summary until the beginning (= first ten minutes) of the next class, then your critical summary is late. If by the beginning of the next class you have still not submitted the critical summary, you receive an automatic N/C. Critical summaries also function as **attendance**: if you are absent *without excuse*, you receive an automatic N/C for that day’s summary. A critical summary due during an *excused* absence may be turned in for full credit no later than the beginning of the next class. Excused absences include, e.g., a serious illness, a family tragedy, or a mandatory court appearance. **Participation** in class is very important; good participation will help out your critical summary grade.

1. Two **Masters papers**, in which you put two Masters we have read in conversation. In ~1,250 words:
   1. *present* Master 1's position on something
   2. *criticize* it via Master 2
   3. *respond* via Master 1
   4. *explain*: Is this a good response? Why or why not?

There will be FOUR opportunities to submit a Masters paper (see ‘Schedule’ below). They are due at the beginning of class, and will be given a letter-grade (e.g., A, A-, B+, …). Students must make arrangements with the instructor regarding papers due during an absence; when the absence is unexcused, the paper will be penalized one-third of a letter-grade for every class day that it is late (e.g., from an A- to a B+).

Breakdown of your final grade:

critical summaries (9) and participation = **70%**

Masters papers (2) = **30%**

# POLICIES

* ACCESSIBILITY  
  Your well-being and success in this course are important to me. Because there simply *are* multiple ways to learn, I encourage you to discuss your learning and comprehension styles with me during office hours or, if necessary, at another arranged time. Should anything about the course—the assignments, readings, or classroom—be less than accessible to you, please let me know. I am happy to adjust the course accordingly. Every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating learning experience.
* ASSIGNMENTS
* Only assignments submitted in hard copy will be accepted.
* Extensions must be requested before the due date.
* Anonymous grading: All assignments must be prepared for name-blind grading. To do this, simply eliminate your name from the document, print it out, and write your name on the back.
* **Plagiarism** means: presenting someone else’s thoughts, ideas, or work as your own, *regardless* of whether this is what is intended*.* Cultivate disgust for it. Avoid it like the plague. Take ownership of your intellectual work.  
  Plagiarism, among other violations of the Academic Conduct Code (<https://www.bu.edu/academics/policies/academic-conduct-code/>), constitute academic misconduct. Proof of academic misconduct will lead to *zero* creditfor a given assignment and may result in failure of the course. If you worry that you might be plagiarizing, let me know. That way we can catch it before it becomes a problem.
* CLASSROOM
* What to bring: No electronic devices (laptops, tablets, smartphones, etc.). You will survive. Just bring yourselves, a writing utensil, a notebook, and your text(s). Failure to bring any one of these (especially the text) on a given day will be a mark down on your participation grade.
* If you will be late or need to leave early, let me know as soon as you can.
* Rules for the road: Argue your case well, but help others make theirs too. Criticize constructively, and attack ideas, not people. Ask for help when you need it and be comfortable admitting when you don’t know something. All this is to ensure that class-time is a fun time for everyone.

# RESOURCES

If English is not your first language and you’re worried about your speaking and writing, I’m here to help! But if you feel that you need additional writing help, you’re encouraged to schedule an appointment with the Educational Resource Center (their services are free): <http://www.bu.edu/erc/writingassistance/>

If you feel that you require additional guidance on a philosopher or a philosophical concept we’re discussing, do let me know. But the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy is a good first stop: <https://plato.stanford.edu/>

If you can read Chinese, the Chinese Text Project is an incredible resource. It contains all the texts we’ll be reading (and more): <https://ctext.org/>

*And if you’re feeling ambitious*: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/chinese-translate-interpret/>

# SCHEDULE

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| W |  | Topic | Reading | Due | Due (2/4) |
| 1 | 2-Jul | Introductions. Chinese philosophy? | ~ | ~ |  |
| UNIT 1. Humanism (a moral order) | | | | | |
|  | 3-Jul | Kongzi 孔子: the excellence of humane (and nameable) | *Analects* (Lunyu論語) 1-2 | CS 0/1 |  |
|  | 5-Jul | -- | *Analects* (Lunyu論語) 3-5 | CS 0/2 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2 | 9-Jul | -- | *Analects* (Lunyu論語) 6-8 | CS 1 |  |
|  | 10-Jul | --; Yang Zhu楊朱: the excellence of self-love | *Analects* (Lunyu論語) 9-10; “Robber Zhi” [tbp: to be provided] | CS 2\* |  |
|  | 12-Jul | Mozi墨子: the excellence of universal love | *Mozi* 14-16, 4, 39 | CS 3 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3 | 16-Jul | Mengzi 孟子: defending the excellence of the humane | *Mengzi* 1 [tbp] | CS 4 | MP 1: Mozi vs. Yang Zhu vs. Kongzi |
|  | 17-Jul | -- | *Mengzi* 2-4 [tbp] |  |  |
|  | 19-Jul | -- | *Mengzi* 5-7 [tbp] | CS 5 |  |
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| UNIT 2. Naturalism/Inhumanism (an amoral order) | | | | | |
| 4 | 23-Jul | Laozi 老子: the excellence of the inhumane and unnameable | *Daodejing*道德經1, 38, 2-10 | CS 6 | MP 2: Mengzi vs. … |
|  | 24-Jul | -- | *Daodejing*道德經11-37 |  |  |
|  | 26-Jul | Zhuangzi 莊子: what can and cannot be named? | *Zhuangzi* 1 | CS 7 |  |
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| 5 | 30-Jul | -- | *Zhuangzi* 2-3 | CS 8 | MP 3: Laozi vs. … |
|  | 31-Jul | -- | *Zhuangzi* 4-5 |  |  |
|  | 2-Aug | -- | *Zhuangzi* 6-7 | CS 9 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| UNIT 3. Standardism (an imposed order) | | | | | |
| 6 | 6-Aug | Han Feizi韓非子: an imposed amoral order | *Han Feizi* 5-8 | CS 10 | MP 4: Zhuangzi vs. … |
|  | 7-Aug | Xunzi 荀子: an imposed moral order | *Xunzi* 1, 19 |  |  |
|  | 9-Aug | -- | *Xunzi* 6, 23, 22 | CS 11 |  |