

Chinese Philosophy

Sample Syllabus,¹ suitable for 200-level undergraduate course with 12-18 students

Professor Information:

Email Address: Qiu.Lin@Duke.edu

Office Hours: Wed 4-5pm

Office Location: West Duke Rm 650

Class Information:

Class Time: Mon and Wed 1-2:15pm

Class Location: West Duke 202

Course Description: This is a survey course covering major schools of classical Chinese philosophy: Confucianism, Mohism and Daoism. We will focus on the Confucian vision of an ideal life, moral development, and self-cultivation, whereby one refines and reshapes one's emotions to achieve ethical excellence and contribute to one's community. We will explore the Mohist advocacy of an ethics in which everyone is to be treated impartially, and the differences between Mohism and Confucianism in relation to key ethical issues. We will emphasize the Daoist rejection of Confucian moral preaching and the idea that the "truth" can be captured through theorizing and argument, as well as the espousal in this tradition of "non-action" and intuitive action. We shall see how advocates of these different philosophies debated and borrowed ideas from each other. Throughout the course, these philosophies will frequently be viewed through comparative perspectives, addressing two key questions: to what extent does Chinese philosophy touch on problems and issues that appear in different cultural and philosophical traditions, and to what extent can insights from across these traditions be appreciated and incorporated into our own lives? Texts will be read in English translation; there will be some references to Chinese terms and phrases, but no prior knowledge of Chinese is required.

Learning Goals:

- Students will gain familiarity with major concepts, views, and debates relating to the self, moral development, impartiality, non-action, and truth acquisition.
- Students will engage critically and constructively with the primary texts.
- Students will improve their proficiency in philosophical writing, defend arguments relating to course themes, and independently develop a project for their final paper based on the course content.

¹ This sample syllabus is adapted from David Wong's (Duke) for PHIL 263 Chinese Philosophy, taught at Duke in Spring 2019. I served as David's teaching assistant for that course and benefited greatly from learning the materials with the students. Indeed, this experience marked a turning point for my career at Duke, as it set me on the course of developing Chinese philosophy first as an AOC, then an AOS.

Texts:

All texts will be made available via Sakai. The schedule below is subject to change—in the event of any changes, I will notify the group by email and update the syllabus on Sakai.

Additional sources:

This is **not** a course requirement, but for those who wish to read or consult the texts in classical Chinese (including those without previous knowledge of Chinese who wish to start learning), the Confucian texts of the *Analects*, *Mengzi* (*Mencius*) and *Xunzi* are available here: <http://ctext.org/confucianism>. The text of the *Mozi* is available here: <http://ctext.org/mohism>. The Daoist texts of *Daodejing* and *Zhuangzi* are available here: <http://ctext.org/daoism>. The Legalist text of *Hanfeizi* is available here: <http://ctext.org/legalism>. In most cases, when you access these texts you will see the Chinese with an English translation below. In addition, at the beginning of each numbered passage you will see a small blue box with two arrows pointing to the right. If you click on this, you will see the Chinese translated line by line. If you hover your cursor over a Chinese character, it will reveal the definition for that character.

Course Requirements:

- **Participation (15%):** Participation in class discussions will be judged on: 1) grasp of and depth of reflection on the assigned reading material; and 2) ability to listen and respond appropriately to other students' comments. Consistent and constructive participation will weigh in favor of the higher grade in the case of a borderline final grade based on your other work.
- **Writing (20%; 35%):** You are required to write a mid-term paper and a final paper for this course. The mid-term assignment will be a response paper of 1,000–1,200 words (double-spaced, 12 point, PDF format). I will provide 6–8 questions relating to the assigned readings for you to respond to. This paper should consist of three sections: exposition; argument; objection and response to objection. The final paper will be a 2,000–2,500-word project which you will develop independently based on the course materials. It is highly recommended that you discuss your ideas with me to determine which topic best suits your philosophical interests and strengths, and how to proceed with your project.
- **Presentation and commentary (20%; 10%):** Before starting to write the final paper, each student is required to present their topic to the class, and to provide commentary on another class member's presentation. During their twenty-minute presentation, the presenter should talk through their project, using 5–6 slides that give the audience: i) an overview of the main topic and motivation for the talk; ii) discussion of the source text; iii) arguments; iv) objection; v) response to the objection; and vi) conclusion and afterthought. In 3–5 minutes, the commentator should aim to offer 2–3 constructive, actionable

suggestions for how the presenter can further develop their ideas and strategize their writing plan.

Other Course Arrangements:

- **Rewrite and Resubmit:** I will leave extensive comments -- critical and constructive -- to the papers you hand in. The expectation is that you can make use of the returned comments to revise and polish the written work in order to strengthen it for a better grade. Good philosophy takes time, patience, and often numerous revisittings of one's ideas. Don't be discouraged if you don't get a perfect grade for the first attempt! All rewritten works will be held at the same grading standard as the first-timers.
- **Pre-class Mini-Talks:** We will start every class with a pre-class mini-talks by students on the assigned reading of the day. In five minutes, speakers should give one or two reasons as to why the assigned reading is worthy of attention for someone who has no prior investment in the topic. Each student needs to sign up for at least one, but preferably two, mini-talks.
- **Extended Office Hours:** In addition to the regular office hour, I will offer extended hours to help you wrestle with paper ideas two weeks before the deadlines. Exact scheduling will be given in class. You are also welcome to make an appointment with me should the announced schedule conflict with yours.
- **Best Talk Prize:** As a group, the students will choose the winner of Best Talk Prize via Sakai Poll. Please vote for the presenter that gives the most compelling and engaging presentation in your mind! The winner will receive a paper copy of Plato's *Republic* as a souvenir for her/his accomplishment .

Grading scale

A+: 95% and up
A: 93-95%
A-: 90-92%
B+: 87-89%
B: 83-86%
B-: 80-82%
C+: 77-79%
C: 73-76%
C-: 70-72%

Reading Schedule

Class 1	Introduction to the course: why Chinese philosophy and how? For the “how” part, we will discuss the expectation, method (a combination of primary+secondary texts), and ways of contributing to our class time together.
Class 2	Confucius (Kongzi) The <i>Anelects</i> : Books 1-12 Please also read the appendices at the end about Confucius’s major students and short explanations of key terms used in the <i>Anelects</i> .
Class 3	The <i>Anelects</i> : Books 13-20.
Class 4	Amy Olberding: “Dreaming of the Duke of Zhou: Exemplarism in the <i>Anelects</i> ”
Class 5	Herbert Fingarette: Chapter 1 (“Human Community as Holy Rite”) in <i>Confucius--The Secular as Sacred</i> (RS).
Class 6	Hall and Ames, “The Focus Field Self in Classical Confucianism.”
Class 7	Carol Gilligan: “Images of Relationship” Chengyang Li: “The Concept of Jen and the Feminist Ethics of Care: A Comparative Study”
Class 8	Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee: “Why Care? A Feminist Re-appropriation of Confucian Xiao”
Class 9	Mozi (Mo-tzu): a major rival to Confucianism during the classical period. <i>Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy</i> : Introduction in the Mozi section Chapter 8 “Honoring the Worthy” Chapter 16 “Impartial Caring” Chapter 17 “A Condemnation of Aggressive War” Chapter 20 “For Moderation in Expenditure” Chapter 25 “For Moderation in Funerals” Chapter 32 “A Condemnation of Musical Performances”
Class 10	Chapter 26: “Obeying One’s Superior” Chapter 31: “On Ghosts” Chapter 35: “A Condemnation of Fatalism”
Class 11	Mengzi (Mencius): the first great theorist of Confucianism <i>Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy</i> Introduction in the Mengzi section Books One and Two

Class 12	Mengzi's defense against Yang Zhu and Mozi. Book Three
Class 13	Chenyang Li: "Does Confucian Ethics Integrate Care Ethics with Justice Ethics?" in MacFarquhar selection from <i>Strangers Drowning</i> .
Class 14	Mengzi's conception of wisdom. Books Four and Five
Class 15	Mengzi's conception of human nature as containing the sprouts of goodness. Books Six and Seven
Class 16	David Wong: "Early Confucian Philosophy and the Development of Compassion"
Class 17	Laozi (Lao tzu) The <i>Daodejing</i> (<i>Tao Te Ching</i>). <i>Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy</i> —read in the <i>Laozi</i> section the introduction and chapters 1-40.
Class 18	In the <i>Daodejing</i> section read chapters 41-81; Holmes Welch: "Tao Today"
Class 19	Zhuangzi (Chuang tzu) <i>Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy</i> —read in the <i>Zhuangzi</i> section the introduction and Chapters 1-3.
Class 20	In the <i>Zhuangzi</i> section read Chapters 4-7.
Class 21	Chad Hansen: "Discriminating About Discriminating" Robert Eno: "Cook Ding's Dao and the Limits of Philosophy"
Class 22	Finish reading the <i>Zhuangzi</i> section David Wong: "Zhuangzi and the Obsession with Being Right."
Class 23	Spillover from previous classes...
Class 24	Student project presentations
Class 25	Student project presentations
Class 26	Student project presentations