

THEO 2570: Chinese Philosophy
Summer 2025, Georgetown University
MTWR 10:45 a.m. - 12:45 p.m., Car Barn 302A

Contact Information

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Course Description

This course introduces students to the diversity of views found in the history of Chinese philosophy, from the distinctive virtue ethical views of classical Confucians and the conceptions of a “state of nature” offered in the texts of the *Mozi* and the *Xunzi* to Daoist accounts of the inherent goodness of human nature and Chinese Buddhist views concerning the self. We will examine the profound ways in which the Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions influenced each other and were shaped by the critiques of competing schools of thought, particularly with the advent of Chinese Buddhism and Neo-Confucian philosophy. We will also evaluate the degree of influence that traditional Chinese philosophy has had on contemporary East Asian cultures, and the reasons why Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism seem to have more in common with (other) religious traditions than with Western philosophical schools or positions.

Required Texts

The following books are available for purchase at the university bookstore.
Ivanhoe, Philip J. and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds. *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Third Edition* (Hackett, 2023)
Slingerland, Edward, trans., *Confucius Analects* (Hackett, 2003)
Tiwald, Justin and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy* (Hackett, 2014)
Van Norden, Bryan, trans., *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Hackett, 2008)

Additional Readings Available on Canvas:

Cline, “Confucian Ethics, Public Policy, and the Nurse-Family Partnership”
Ivanhoe, “The Concept of *de* (‘Virtue’) in the *Laozi*”
Ivanhoe, “Heaven as a Source for Ethical Warrant in Early Confucianism”
Levin, “Festival’s Resurgence has Chinese Sending Manna to Heavens”
Sun, “The Contemporary Revival and Reinvention of Confucian Ritual Practices”
Tiwald, “A Right of Rebellion in the *Mengzi*?”
Van Norden, “Confucius on Gay Marriage”
Van Norden, “Why the US Doesn’t Understand Chinese Thought—and Must”
Xing, “How Chinese Youth Enable the Revival of Confucian Culture”

Course Objectives

A course on Chinese philosophy should help you to appreciate the underpinnings not only of Chinese culture, but other cultures as well, and thus help you to understand why cultures differ and in what ways we might learn from one another. I hope that as a result of participating in this course, you will begin to develop a nuanced understanding of the major philosophical traditions of East Asia, but I

also hope you will be better able to understand your own commitments, values, and assumptions. In addition, I hope you will be better able to understand others, and the reasons why they may find meaning in a different set of commitments and values. Additionally, I hope you will be:

- motivated to take the life of the mind seriously.
- motivated to risk your ideas about your own beliefs and practices in dialogue with others and in internal dialogue with yourself.
- motivated to think seriously about what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person from a different tradition; to be an intelligent and passionate reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions, wishes and desires that someone so placed might have.
- better able to see yourself not simply as a member of a culture, group, or nation, but as a human being bound to all other humans by common values and concerns.

Course Requirements

The requirements for this course are simple and not burdensome in number. However, the expectations for **quality** work will be very high.

1. Attendance, attentiveness in class, careful reading of the assigned texts, active participation in class discussions and in-class activities (10%)
2. 2 Exams (40%), based on material from the readings and lectures. The exams will consist of a combination of objective, short answer, and essay questions. They will not be cumulative. *There will be no final examination in this course.*
3. 3 Papers (50%), two shorter (2-3 pages, 15% each) and one longer (20%). You will have a choice of paper topics, which will be posted on Canvas, together with detailed writing guidelines, length requirements, and grading criteria.

Scale

A 94-100	C+ 78-79
A- 90-93	C 74-77
B+ 88-89	C- 70-73
B 84-87	D 60-69
B- 80-83	F 59 and under

Grades will only be rounded up beginning at .5 (e.g., a grade of 89.5 will be rounded up to a 90 but a grade of 89.4 will be rounded down to 89).

Policies & Important Notes

1. **Attendance and Participation in Class Discussions.** Every student is expected to attend all class meetings, to be on time, to listen, be attentive, and ask questions, and to read the assigned texts by the assigned dates. Students may have one unexcused absence without automatic penalty to the final course grade. For each class missed thereafter without prior permission, your final course grade will drop by one step (e.g., from B to B-). Your attendance and participation grade in this course will be affected by any unexcused absences and tardies. Please send me an e-mail to notify me if you will be unable to attend class due to an illness, religious observance, or family emergency so that I can record your absence as excused. If you must miss multiple days of class for any reason, you should contact your Dean. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class meeting. Students who are tardy will be marked absent unless they check in with the professor in person after class.
2. **Papers and Exams.** You are required to turn in a hard copy of assignments, except for the final paper which is to be submitted on Canvas. No late papers or examinations will be accepted and no

“make ups” of exams will be given, except in cases of illness or other truly exceptional circumstances, in which case I should receive official documentation.

3. Office Hours and Emails. I am normally able to reply to emails within 24 hours Monday-Friday (excepting holidays). Please contact me via email if you would like to set up an appointment.

4. Classroom Etiquette. Phones and other electronic devices should be silenced and put away during class. If you use your phone in class, your participation grade will be lowered. The use of laptops will not be permitted in class, unless a compelling reason is offered (e.g., a certified learning disability). If you have electronic versions of the texts, you may use a device when we read passages in class.

5. Studying and Grading. The quality of your work (including your participation in class discussions) should reflect close reading of texts, critical reflection on the material, and careful revision of your written work. You are always welcome to ask questions in order to improve your future performance, but if you wish to contest a grade, you must do so in hard copy within one week of my handing the assignment back. You should include a copy of the graded assignment and a typed explanation of why you believe it merits reconsideration based on the criteria you were given for the assignment.

6. Policy on Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Fraud. Students are expected to be familiar with Georgetown’s Honor System and to abide by the Standard of Conduct outlined therein. The section on plagiarism is especially important: “Plagiarism, in any of its forms, and whether intentional or unintentional, violates standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism is the act of passing off as one’s own the ideas or writings of another. While different academic disciplines have different modes of attributing credit, all value the contributions of individuals to the general corpus of knowledge and expertise. Students are responsible for educating themselves as to the proper mode of attributing credit in any course or field. Note that plagiarism can be said to have occurred without any affirmative showing that a student’s use of another’s work was intentional” (Undergraduate Bulletin, IV.3.b). Please note that the use of ChatGPT or any AI to write papers constitutes plagiarism. All work submitted in this course must be your own and produced exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must always be properly acknowledged and documented. Academic dishonesty is a serious breach of the contract we all have with each other and all cases of academic dishonesty in this course will be referred to the Honor Council.

7. Instructional Continuity. Students will be notified via email if we will be unable to meet in person due to health conditions, inclement weather or another reason, and every effort will be made to maintain instructional continuity through zoom conferencing on Canvas.

Schedule of Lectures and Assignments

(Reading assignments are to be completed before class, by the date on which they are listed.)

Week 1—The Origins of Ancient Chinese Philosophy & the Analects

M 6/2: Early China, Kongzi, and the Analects

Reading: Slingerland (tr.), *Confucius Analects*, pp. xiii-xxv (Introduction) and the following passages from the *Analects*:

On Kongzi-*Analects* 2.4, 5.1, 5.26, 5.28, 7.1-7.5, 7.12, 7.32-7.34, 9.2, 14.32, 14.38, 14.39, 15.42, 16.13, 19.22, 19.24.

On self-cultivation & moral character-1.15, 2.9-2.10, 3.23, 4.7, 4.14, 4.17, 5.27, 6.22, 7.3, 7.21-7.22, 7.28, 9.19, 9.23-9.25, 11.16, 11.22, 14.30-14.31, 15.15-15.16, 15.28, 15.30, 16.11, 17.2.

On *de* 德 (Virtue)-2.1, 2.3, 4.11, 4.25, 6.29, 8.2, 12.10, 12.19, 12.21, 14.4-14.5, 14.33-14.34, 15.27, 17.14, 19.2.

T 6/3: Ritual and Moral Cultivation in the *Analects*

Reading: *Confucius Analects*, On the rites (*li* 禮)-1.12, all of Book Three, 6.25, 6.27, 8.2, 9.3, all of Book Ten, 12.1, 14.41, 17.11, 17.21.

On *Ren* 仁 (“Goodness”; “Humaneness”)-1.3, 4.2-4.6, 5.8, 5.19, 6.26, 6.30, 7.30, 12.1-12.3, 12.20, 12.22, 12.24, 13.19, 13.27, 14.1, 14.4, 14.6, 14.9-10, 14.16-14.17, 15.9-15.10, 15.33, 15.35-15.36, 17.6, 19.6.

On the *junzi* 君子 (“gentleman”; “exemplary person”; “cultivated person”)-5.3, 6.18, 7.26, 7.37, 8.6, 9.14, 11.21, 12.4, 12.5, 12.8, 12.16, 12.24, 13.23, 13.25-13.26, 14.27-14.28, 14.42, 15.2, 15.18-15.19, 15.21-15.23, 15.34, 15.37, 16.6, 16.10, 17.7, 17.23, 17.24, 18.10, 19.3-19.4, 19.7, 19.9-19.10, 19.12, 19.21.

W 6/4: Ancestor Veneration and Filial Piety in the *Analects*

Reading: *Confucius Analects*-On filial piety-1.2, 1.6, 1.11, 2.5-2.8, 2.21, 4.18-4.21, 8.3, 11.5, 11.22, 12.11, 13.18, 14.43-14.44, 17.21, 19.18.

On death and the ancestors-1.9, 2.24, 3.4, 3.12, 3.26, 6.3, 6.7, 6.10-6.11, 6.22, 7.9-7.11, 7.13, 9.12, 10.7, 10.9, 10.11, 10.14, 11.8-11.12, 14.40, 17.21, 19.1, 19.14, 19.17.

Van Norden, “Confucius on Gay Marriage” (on Canvas)

Th 6/5: Heaven and the Way in the *Analects*

Reading: Ivanhoe, “Heaven as a Source...” (on Canvas)

Confucius Analects-On Heaven-3.13, 3.24, 5.13, 6.28, 7.23, 7.35, 8.19, 9.5, 11.9, 12.5, 14.35, 16.8, 17.19.

On the Way-4.8, 4.9, 5.2, 5.7, 5.16, 5.21, 6.12, 6.17, 6.20, 7.6, 8.7, 8.9, 8.13, 9.11, 9.30, 11.20, 11.24, 12.19, 13.21, 14.1, 14.3, 14.36-14.37, 15.7, 15.29, 15.32, 16.2, 19.2, 19.7.

Week 2—Mohism, Confucianism & Daoism in Dialogue

M 6/9: Mozi’s State of Nature & Impartial Caring

Reading: *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (hereafter, RCCP) pp. 59-113

****FIRST PAPER DUE****

T 6/10: Mengzi’s Theory of Human Nature

Reading: *Mengzi: With Selections* pp. xiii-xv, 1-62 (“Why Read This Book?” & Bks. 1-2)

W 6/11: Moral Cultivation in the Mengzi & Mengzi’s Political View

Reading: *Mengzi: With Selections* pp. 63-197 (Bks. 3-7); Tiwald, “A Right of Rebellion...” (Canvas)

Th 6/12: The Daoist Conception of the *Dao* and Human Nature

Reading: *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* pp. 161-162 and *Daodejing* chapters 1, 4, 14, 16, 18, 21, 23, 25, 30, 32, 34, 35, 40, 41, 42, 46, 48, 52, 62, 67, 73, 77, 81 (on the *Dao*); chapters 15, 28, 32, 55 (on human nature)

Week 3—Ethics and Politics in Early Daoism

M 6/16: De 德 (“Virtue”) and the Ideal Society in the *Daodejing*

Reading: Ivanhoe, “The Concept of *de*...” (on Canvas); *Daodejing* chapters 2, 7, 8, 10, 15, 21, 22, 24, 38, 41, 49, 51, 54, 55, 58, 59, 63, 66, 70, 71, 72, 76, 78 (on *de* 德 “Virtue”).
Daodejing chapters 2, 3, 11, 19, 25, 28, 32, 37, 43, 47, 48, 55, 57, 63, 64, 70, 71 (on naturalness and wuwei); chapters 3, 13, 16, 17, 19, 26, 30, 31, 39, 53, 54, 57, 58, 60, 61, 65, 66, 68, 75, 77, 80 (on the ideal society).

T 6/17: Skepticism and Antirationalism in the *Zhuangzi*

Reading: RCCP pp. 207-231 (selections from *Zhuangzi* chapters 1-4)

W 6/18: Ethics in the *Zhuangzi*

Reading: RCCP pp. 231-250 (selections from chapters 5-32)

Th 6/19: No Class—Juneteenth

Week 4—Confucianism & Buddhism in Dialogue

M 6/23: **EXAM ONE**

T 6/24: Xunzi’s Theory of Human Nature, Ritual & Ethics

Reading: RCCP pp. 255-307 (selections from chapters 1-29)

W 6/25: Buddhist Philosophy

Reading: *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy* (hereafter, RLCP) pp. 69-74, pp. 75-80 (Huiyuan)

Th 6/26: Buddhism in China

Reading: RLCP pp. 91-98 (Huineng), 98-106 (Zongmi)

Week 5—Later Chinese Philosophy

M 6/30: The Cheng-Zhu School

Reading: RLCP, pp. 113-122 (Intro to Neo-Confucianism), 168-230 (Zhu Xi)

****SECOND PAPER DUE****

T 7/1: Wang Yangming’s Philosophy

Reading: RLCP pp. 261-289 (Wang Yangming)

W 7/2: Philosophy, Religion & Culture: Confucianism in China Today

Reading: Sun, “The Contemporary Revival...” (on Canvas)

Levin, “Festival’s Resurgence has Chinese Sending Manna to Heavens” (on Canvas)

Xing, “How Chinese Youth Enable the Revival of Confucian Culture” (on Canvas)

Cline, “Confucian Ethics, Public Policy...” (on Canvas)

Van Norden, “Why the US Doesn’t Understand Chinese Thought—and Must”

Th 7/3: *EXAM TWO*****

FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE ON SATURDAY, JULY 6 AND SHOULD BE SUBMITTED ON CANVAS.

THERE WILL BE NO FINAL EXAMINATION IN THIS COURSE.

**SCS Syllabus Statement
Sexual Misconduct**

Georgetown University and its faculty and staff are committed to supporting survivors and those impacted by sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, and stalking. Georgetown requires faculty members, unless otherwise designated as confidential, to report all disclosures of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator or a Deputy Title IX Coordinator. If you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a professor or staff member in or outside of the classroom (with the exception of disclosures in papers), that faculty or staff member must report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator, or Deputy Title IX Coordinator. The coordinator will, in turn, reach out to the student to provide support, resources, and the option to meet. Please note that the student is not required to meet with the Title IX coordinator and no action will be taken without the student's awareness. More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website: <https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/resourcecenter>. If you would prefer to speak to someone confidentially, Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources that can provide support and assistance. These resources include:

- Health Education Services: Sexual Assault Response and Prevention: sarp@georgetown.edu
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS): 202.687.6985

Additional resources are included below:

- Georgetown Self-Care Resource Guide: <https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/health-promotion/self-care/>
- Georgetown Wellness Wheel: <https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/hoya-wellness-wheel/>
- Georgetown Guide to Recognizing Students in Distress: <https://studentaffairs.georgetown.edu/studentoutreach/facultystaffresources/>

Pregnancy Modifications and Adjustments

Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant students. At any point throughout their pregnancy students may request adjustments/modifications based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication or medical need. Students may also request accommodations following labor and delivery based on a complication or medical need.

To request pregnancy modifications, please complete the [SCS Pregnancy Modification Request Form](https://forms.gle/ZBfASxui7u13A8TU6): <https://forms.gle/ZBfASxui7u13A8TU6>

More information about pregnancy modifications can be found on the Title IX Georgetown University Website: <https://titleix.georgetown.edu/title-ix-pregnancy/student-pregnancy/>