



PHIL 371

Instructor

Prof. Edward Slingerland

Office: Buch E163

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Buchanan E163

Winter Session, Term 1 2023

edward.slingerland@ubc.ca

W 9-10

TH 10-11

Also virtual, by appointment:

<https://ubc.zoom.us/j/4422938752?pwd=aGxFRVU5bkZvUS9kUWxSMmFsWktCdz09>

Meeting ID: 442 293 8752

Passcode: 520254

Section 1 MWF 1-2pm in SWNG 105

Section 2 MWF 2-3pm in SWNG 105

Section 3 MWF 3-4pm in SWNG 407

**** Students must attend their assigned section unless given prior permission**

TA:

Office:

Course Description

This course is designed to give students a thorough introduction to early (pre 221 BCE) Chinese thought, its contemporary implications, and the role of philosophy and religion in human flourishing. This period of Chinese history witnessed the formation of all of the major indigenous schools of Chinese thought (Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism and Legalism), which in turn had an impact on the development of East Asian cultural history that is still felt today. Students will be exposed to both

received texts and recently discovered archeological texts; this combination of sources will both enrich students' understanding of the world of thought in early China and call into question the boundaries drawn between the traditionally-defined "schools" such as Daoism or Confucianism.

Important themes to be discussed include the ideal of *wu-wei* or "effortless action," the paradox of how one can consciously try not to try, models of the self and self-cultivation, rationality versus emotions, trust and human cooperation, and the structure and impact of different spiritual and political ideals. We will also explore parallels with Western philosophical and religious traditions, the relevance of early Chinese thought for contemporary debates in ethics, moral education, and political philosophy, and the manner in which early Chinese models of the self anticipate recent developments in the evolutionary and cognitive sciences.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will have an understanding of:

- the basics of Chinese thought from earliest times to the Qin unification (221 BCE)
- what it means to study religious or philosophical thought from an academic perspective
- what we mean by "religion" or "philosophy"
- different models of ethics and ethical reasoning
- the basics of how the human mind works (basic cognitive science and social psychology)
- the connection between Chinese thought and contemporary issues and modern scientific models of the self
- benefits of studying ancient and alternative cultures for citizens of a globalized world

Course Format

The structure of this course is **very unusual**, and students must pay close attention to the syllabus. In this "flipped" course format, students spend a portion of their "classroom" hours watching lectures at home, use one day of class meeting taking a quiz on the course materials and meeting with the TA and then once a week have a small-group discussion section with the professor. The standard schedule looks like this:

Mondays: A weekly quiz that will test students on the lectures and readings for the upcoming week's discussion. The quizzes will start on the hour and are designed to take a maximum of 25 minutes. The second half of Monday will be dedicated to a tutorial session with the TA, who can give feedback on the quiz questions, help with the course material, etc.

Wednesdays: Students will meet in person with the professor for group discussion and small-group activities, often involving engagement with the assigned primary texts. Attendance is mandatory, and a portion of the student's grade will come from demonstrated preparation and engagement in these activities.

HOWEVER, in October this briefly switches to a Wednesday-Friday pattern in order to accommodate the two Monday holidays, before reverting to the standard Monday-Wednesday pattern. Please make note of this on the syllabus.

The video lectures are part of a MOOC (massive-open-online-course) designed by the professor for the edX platform:

<https://www.edx.org/course/chinese-thought-ancient-wisdom-meets-modern-science-part-1-2>

<https://www.edx.org/course/chinese-thought-ancient-wisdom-meets-modern-science-part-2-5>

Students must create an account on the edX platform if they wish to access the edX versions of the class videos, which have the advantage of coming with subtitles, transcripts and lecture slides. (There is no charge for this). Lecture videos (but without the lecture slides and transcripts) can also be found on Youtube:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9ZsbWm-KwKYogaet04QWYQ>

The amount of assigned readings will be varied week-by-week to ensure that the expected workload combination of video watching, class time, and reading does not exceed the norm for a 300-level class.

Required Texts

Slingerland, Edward. *Trying Not to Try: Ancient China, Modern Science and the Power of Spontaneity*
Ivanhoe, P.J. and Van Norden, Bryan (eds.), *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*

All other readings will be available on-line (students will need to access these readings through the UBC library) or on the class Canvas site, as indicated.

Course Requirements

Students are expected to watch the designated video lectures on their own time, which will take approximately 1-2 hours each week; near the end of the semester the number of videos to be watched will decrease and the amount of reading increase. Students must attend their assigned section unless given prior permission.

Attendance at discussion meetings is mandatory, as is arriving with the assigned text, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, which will often be used in class in weeks when *RCCP* reading has been assigned. **Also please note that use of electronic devices, including laptop computers, is not permitted during class;** students needing a special concession in this regard must consult with the instructor the first week of class. On Quiz days (typically Mondays) the short quiz will be followed by a tutorial session with the TA, who will be available to discuss material for upcoming discussion session. On the meeting day following the quiz (typically Wednesdays), the professor will run a discussion section. Attendance is required, and students are expected to arrive in class having watched the videos, having completed the readings covered in the previous class session's quiz, with the required textbook, and having prepared for discussion. Some weeks students will be assigned a short preparatory exercise for the following week; it is your responsibility if you miss class to find out what this might be. The class participation component of the grade will be based on attendance, activity on the Canvas discussion board, active participation in class and degree of class preparation.

Although the quizzes cannot be made up, the lowest two scores will be dropped.

In addition to the weekly quizzes, students will be assessed on an in-class, midterm essay and a final exam. The midterm will be administered **in class on Friday, 10/20**. The quizzes and the final will consist of a mixture of multiple choice, ID, short answer and/or essay questions; the midterm will be a short, in-class essay. Grading for the course will be as follows:

Discussion attendance and Participation:	15%
Quizzes:	36% (4% each, 11 total, lowest 2 dropped)
Midterm:	20%
Final exam:	29%

Class Policies

Students who need to request accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Access and Diversity (<http://students.ubc.ca/about/access>) within the first week of class.

The final exam time and location will be announced in class as soon as it is available, and students will then have one week from the time of announcement to report any potential scheduling conflicts to the instructor; after this period, no alternate exam accommodations will be made. In any case, exam accommodations will only be made for conflicts with exams in other classes; personal travel plans cannot, under any circumstance, be accommodated, so please do not make vacation travel plans until the exam date is announced.

Academic concessions concerning make-up exams, class absences, etc. are granted only rarely and at the sole discretion of the instructor, and any concessions that are granted must also be officially cleared by Academic Advising (<http://students.arts.ubc.ca/advising/academic-performance/help-academic-concession>).

The instructor strictly adheres to the guidelines for Discipline for Academic Misconduct published in the UBC-Vancouver *Calendar* (<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,286,0,0>) for plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. It is the responsibility of the student to familiarize him- or herself with these guidelines.

Please disable all cell phones, beepers, personal communications devices, and any other sound-producing appliances before entering the classroom. **Also please note that use of electronic devices, including laptop computers, is not permitted during class;** students needing a special concession in this regard must consult with the instructor the first week of class.

Notes of class videos may only be made for the purposes of individual or group study, or for other non-commercial purposes that reasonably arise from your membership in this class. Permission to make recordings of discussions must be requested from the instructor. Notes and recordings of this class may not be exchanged or distributed for any commercial purpose, for compensation, or for any purpose other than your personal study. Unless authorized by the University in advance and explicitly and in writing permitted by the instructor, commercial or any non-personal use of class notes or recordings constitutes an unauthorized activity, and students who violate this policy are subject to University discipline.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

All videos can be accessed through the MOOC CHINA 300.1x and CHINA 300.2x, “Chinese Thought: Ancient Wisdom Meets Modern Science,” which is broken into two parts on the edX platform.

09/06 Introduction to the class, course material, course structure

09/08 Discussion: Why (and How) Do We Study Other Cultures?

This class session will focus on what it means to study religious or philosophical thought from an academic perspective, what we mean by “religion” or “philosophy,” and why studying Chinese thought in particular might be helpful.

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.1x, Module 1)

Intro video: Why (and How) Do We Study Other Cultures? (5:39)

Lecture 2: What Does it Mean to Study “Thought”? (10:09)

09/11 TA tutorial and Quiz #1, covering 09/08 material and the following material for the 09/13 discussion

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.1x, Module 1)

Lecture 3: Human Thought: Mind vs. Body, Reason vs. Emotion, Cold vs. Hot Cognition (14:16)

Lecture 4: Human Nature and Civilization: Institutions, Commitments, and Different Models of Ethics (16:11)

Lecture 5: Wu-wei 無爲 (ooo-way), De 德 (duh) and the Paradox of Spontaneity (16:02)

Readings

Trying Not to Try, Introduction (pp. 1-18), Chapter One (pp. 19-37), and Chapter Seven (pp. 168-196)

09/13 Discussion: Two-System Theory, Different Models of Ethics, Knowing How vs. Knowing That

This class session will focus on the structure of human cognition (two systems theory), how this relates to different models of ethics and theories about how human beings made the transition to large-scale societies, and the distinctive sorts of spiritual ideals (and tensions) that come with an emphasis on virtues and ethical know-how.

09/18 Quiz #2, covering the following material for the 09/20 discussion:

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.1x, Module 1)

Lecture 6: (Very) Early China (16:15)

Lecture 7: Beginnings of Written History in China: The Shang Dynasty (13:39)

Lecture 8: Themes in Shang Dynasty Thought (15:43)

Lecture 9: Introduction to the Zhou Dynasty (17:52)

Lecture 10: Zhou Dynasty Thought (15:27)

Readings

Excerpts from *Book of Odes*, *Book of Documents* (available on class Canvas site)

Excerpt from McDonald, Edward. (2009). Getting over the Walls of Discourse: “Character Fetishization” in Chinese Studies. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 68(04), 1189-1213. (Canvas)

Henrich, Joseph. (2014). Rice, Psychology and Innovation. *Science*, 344, 593-594.

<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/344/6184/593>

NOTE: This is a light week, so students are strongly encouraged to begin video-watching and reading for the following week (Confucius), which is a quite heavy week

09/20 Discussion: Introduction to Early China

This session will focus on an introduction to early Chinese history and the first historical dynasties in China, those of the Shang and Zhou, as well as aspects of the Chinese written language.

09/25 Quiz #3, covering the following material for the 09/27 discussion:

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.1x, Module 2)

Intro video: Becoming civilized (3:33)

Lecture 1: Confucius and the Analects (17:37)

Lecture 2: "I transmit but do not innovate." (Not quite.) (17:14)

Lecture 3: Ritual: Acquiring a behavioral language (16:48)

Lecture 4: Learning: Acquiring the Ability to think (14:03)

Lecture 5: Holistic Education: The role of the arts in morality (14:30)

Lecture 6: Building cold into hot: Moral skill, flexibility and autonomy (16:13)

Lecture 7: At Home in Virtue: Harmonizing our nature with civilized life (16:17)

Lecture 8: "Like the wind over the grass": Non-coercive order in the Analects (12:22)

Lecture 9: Beware the village poseur! The paradox of wu-wei in the Analects (13:23)

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Kongzi (Confucius) "the Analects" (pp. 1-50)

Trying Not to Try, Chapter Three (pp. 54-82)

09/27 Discussion: Confucius

This session explores the first great philosopher of China, Confucius, and the task he faced of rescuing what he saw as a profoundly degenerated age—one that reflected a sharp decline from the spiritual and political harmony of the ancient. His proposed solution was to reshape human beings into perfected sages through ritual, classical texts, and the arts. What Confucius has much to say about the role of cultural forms, the relationship of the individual to society, and the inextricably social nature of human beings serves as an important corrective to some of excessively individualist aspects of our modern self-conceptions.

10/02 National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (no class)

10/04 Quiz #4, covering the following material for the 10/06 discussion

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.1x, Module 3)

Intro video: Back to Nature (2:45)

Lecture 1: The World's First Hippies (12:32)

Lecture 2: Laozi and the Daodejing (11:20)

Lecture 3: The Unhewn Wood and the Desires of the Belly (15:00)

Lecture 4: The Desires of the Eye: Madison Ave. and the Hedonic Treadmill (13:39)

Lecture 5: "He Who Speaks Does Not Know": Getting Beyond Language (18:06)

Lecture 6: Samsara: The Cycle of Reversion (9:55)

Lecture 7: Do Nothing, Be Natural: Laozi's Golden Age (20:09)

Lecture 8: New Insights from the Earth: The Guodian Laozi (15:37)

Lecture 9: Instrumentalism and the Challenges of “Being Natural” (16:44)

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Ch 4 Laozi (the *Daodejing*) (pp. 157-200)

Trying Not to Try, Chapter Four (pp. 83-110)

10/06 Discussion: Laozi

In this session we encounter the Daoist backlash against Confucianism in the form of Laozian “primitivism,” the world’s first documented counter-cultural movement. Laozi advocated rejecting learning, technology and society and a return to a natural, simple life in small agricultural villages. He has much to teach us about the dangers of hypocrisy, the potentially corrupting influence of social norms, and the value of simplicity

10/09 Thanksgiving (no class)

10/11 Quiz #5, covering the following material for the 10/13 discussion:

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.1x, Module 4)

Intro video: Confronting Social Inequality (4:45)

Lecture 1: Mozi and Materialist State Consequentialism (11:53)

Lecture 2: Honor the Worthy: Job Performance and Ideological Unity (16:30)

Lecture 3: Others’ Fathers are Your Father: The Doctrine of Impartial Caring (16:03)

Lecture 4: Against Music and Funerals: The Anti-Elite Chapters (17:20)

Lecture 5: On Ghosts and Heaven’s Will: Mozi’s Religious Fundamentalism and Activism (17:25)

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Ch 2, the *Mozi* (pp. 55-107)

Singer, Peter. (1991). A Refutation of Ordinary Morality. *Ethics* 101.3: 625-633

<http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/199104--.pdf>

Brand, Russell. (2014). What monkeys and the Queen taught me about inequality. *The Guardian*, Monday October 13 2014.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/oct/13/monkeys-queen-inequality-capitalism-rich-poor-private-security>

10/13 Discussion: Mozi

Impatient with both the Daoist primitivists and the Confucians, Mozi was the world’s first great utilitarian or consequentialist thinker, arguing that rational calculation of social benefits should drive our behavior and that we should strive to practice “impartial caring.” His viewpoints echo those of modern utilitarians such as Peter Singer, sharing the same strengths and weaknesses.

10/16 Quiz #6, covering the following material for the 10/18 discussion:

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.1x, Module 4)

Lecture 6: Later Mohist Logic and the Mid-Warring-States Linguistic Turn (17:21)
Lecture 7: The Discovery of the Body: Yang Zhu and The Mid-Warring-States Physiological Turn (15:19)
Lecture 8: Inward Training: Qi and Self-Cultivation (14:03)
Lecture 9: Gaozi? The Guodian School of Confucianism (18:37)

Readings

The Logicians, Yang Zhu and *Inward Training* (Canvas)

Excerpts from Guodian Confucian texts (Canvas)

Emerson, John. 1996. Yang Chu's [Yang Zhu's] Discovery of the Body. *Philosophy East and West*, Volume 46-4: 533-566.

http://www.jstor.org/stable/1399495?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

10/18 Discussion: Late Warring States transition

In this session we will also explore two important shifts in Warring States thought, the Linguistic and Physiological turns, and also explore a previously lost school of Confucianism, only recently rediscovered in the so-called Guodian manuscripts.

10/20 In-class Midterm

10/23 Quiz #7, covering the following material for the 10/25 discussion

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.2x, Module 5)

Intro video: Cultivating the Moral Sprouts (4:15)
Lecture 1: Mencius and the New World of Late-Warring States Thought (16:39)
Lecture 2: Mencius and Gaozi: Where Do You "Get" Rightness? (11:39)
Lecture 3: Human Nature is "Good": Mencius and the Moral Sprouts (14:18)
Lecture 4: Evidence for the Sprouts: Mencian (18:57)
Lecture 5: Evidence for the Sprouts: Modern Scientific (20:45)
Lecture 6: Emotion vs. Reason: Mencian Sentimentalism (17:10)
Lecture 7: "Extension": The Importance of Moral Imagination (21:51)
Lecture 8: Mencian Gradualism and Internalism: The Wisdom of the Body (14:46)
Lecture 9: The Paradox of Wu-wei in the Mencius (12:47)

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Ch 3, *Mengzi (Mencius)* (pp. 111-153)

Trying Not to Try, Chapter Five (pp. 111-137)

10/25 Discussion: Mencius

Mencius revives the thought of Confucius with a twist: cultivation and refinement are important, but only because they represent the natural development of tendencies already inside us. A great moral psychologist, Mencius argued that we all possess the sprouts of proper moral behavior, and need to cultivate them like a patient farmer. From a contemporary perspective, his model of moral education looks both psychologically sophisticated and prescient.

10/30 Quiz #8, covering the following material for the 11/01 discussion:

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.2x, Module 6)

Intro video: Zhuangzi and the Spirituality of the Mundane (2:40)

Lecture 1: Zhuangzi and the Zhuangzi (12:05)

Lecture 2: Fallenness: Getting Rid of the Human Essence (16:08)

Lecture 3: Undergrowth in the Head: The Problem of Fixed Ideas (12:36)

Lecture 4: Qi and the Fasting of the Mind (19:46)

Lecture 5: Guided by the Spirit: Skill Stories in the Zhuangzi (19:31)

Lecture 6: Zhuangzi and the Embodied Mind (18:33)

Lecture 7: Drunk on Heaven: In the World But Not of It (19:10)

Lecture 8: The Paradox of Wu-wei in the Zhuangzi (12:25)

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Ch 5, the *Zhuangzi* (pp. 203-243)

Trying Not to Try, Chapter Six (pp. 137-167)

11/01 Discussion: Zhuangzi

Suspicious of any fixed, explicit system of morality, the Daoist Zhuangzi advocated freeing the mind of all doctrines and value judgments, “fasting the mind,” so that our innate Heavenly tendencies can be activated. He believed that the only way to move through the world properly was to get beyond linguistic distinctions and logical thought in order to perceive and engage with reality directly. Zhuangzi has much to teach us about the power of the unconscious and the importance of embodied skills.

11/06 Quiz #9, covering the following material for the 11/08 discussion (material reduced because of short gap between discussion and next quiz)

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.2x, Module 7)

Intro video: The Value of Institutions (3:39)

Lecture 1: Xunzi and the return to externalism (15:18)

Lecture 2: Xunzi on the mind and free will (15:08)

Lecture 3: Xunzi on the Origins of Confucian Culture (23:27)

Lecture 4: Building Cold into Hot: Xunzian Wu-wei (15:23)

Lecture 5: Heavenly and Human: The World’s First Functional Theory of Religion (21:19)

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Ch 6, the *Xunzi* (pp. 247-291)

Boyd, Robert, Richerson, Peter, & Henrich, Joseph. (2011). The cultural niche: why social learning is essential for human adaptation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 108 Suppl 2, 10918-10925.

http://www.pnas.org/content/108/Supplement_2/10918.abstract

11/08 Discussion: Xunzi

Xunzi marks in many ways a return to the original vision of Confucius, where spiritual and moral perfection is seen as the product of a long process of training and self-cultivation.

11/13-11/17 Midterm Break

11/20 Quiz #10, covering the following material for the 11/22 discussion:

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.2x, Module 7)

Lecture 6: A Perennial Debate: Xunzi vs. Mencius / Conservatism and Liberalism (from China 300.2x, Module 7) (21:58)

Readings

Jonathan Haidt on “The Moral Roots of Liberals and Conservatives”

http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind?language=en

Iyer, R., Koleva, S. P., Graham, J., Ditto, P. H., & Haidt, J. (2012). Understanding Libertarian morality: The psychological dispositions of self-identified libertarians. *PLoS ONE* 7:e42366
[doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0042366](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0042366).

Hatemi, Peter et al. (2011). A genome-wide analysis of liberal and conservative political attitudes. *Journal of Politics*, 73(1), 1-15.

http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1017/s0022381610001015?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

11/22 Discussion: Perennial Debates in Early Chinese Thought

In this section of the course we will discuss very modern-sounding aspects of Xunzi's thought, including the fact that he was one of the earliest naturalist or atheistic philosophers in world history, presenting a functionalist view of religion that anticipates in many ways the views of modern scholars. We will also review the great debate between Mencius and Xunzi concerning human nature, seeing how it maps onto perennial debates between liberals and conservatism, and discuss how it may reflect basic tensions in human inborn dispositions, and discuss the Confucian/Daoist disagreement concerning the value of culture and learning.

11/27 Quiz #11, covering the following material for the 11/29 discussion:

Videos to be Watched (from China 300.2x, Module 7)

Lecture 7: Han Feizi and Legalism (17:32)

Lecture 8: Standards, Methods and The Power of Position (17:54)

Lecture 9: Institutional Wu-wei: Institutionalism à la Machiavelli (19:28)

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Ch 7, the *Hanfeizi* (pp. 295-342)

Goldin, Paul. 2011. Persistent Misconceptions about Chinese ‘Legalism.’” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 38.1: 88-104.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1540-6253.2010.01629.x/abstract>

Yang, Soon-ja. 2011. Shen Dao's Own Voice in the Shenzi Fragments. *Dao* 10(2):187-207.

<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11712-011-9212-7>

11/29 Discussion: Legalism and the Unification of China

In this section we will discuss the “Legalist” school associated with Xunzi's disciple, Han Feizi, and how it can be seen as growing out of, but significantly differing from, Xunzi's views. This will also involve students in a consideration of broader theoretical issues concerning the rule of law versus norms-based theories of human sociality.

12/06 Discussion: Conceptions of the Self

In this final class discussion, we will zoom out from our considerations of individual early Chinese thinkers and consider some of the overarching questions that have concerned us this term. What moral resources does the individual possess? What is the relationship of the individual to society? What is the proper relation of reason to the emotions? How can we use language without being used by it? Plus: we vote for our favorite philosopher.