

HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY
Department of Philosophy and Religion

**The Quest for Sagehood:
An Introduction to Chinese Philosophical and Religious Thought**

Instructor:

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Institution:

Hofstra University, a private nonsectarian coeducational university

Course level and type:

Middle level undergraduate seminar

Hours of Instruction:

50 minutes, three times per week for 14 weeks

Enrollment and year last taught:

15 students, Spring 1999

Pedagogical Reflections:

This course is designed to provide students with an in-depth look at the primary texts in ancient Confucianism and Taoism. Some eyebrows may be raised by the fact that I start them off reading *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (ZAAM)*, by Rober Pirsig, a book that has almost nothing to do with Chinese thought (as the author freely admits) despite the vaguely Asian sounding title. I use ZAAM as a tool for softening up some of the ontological and cosmological assumptions that my students carry into the course. My primary goal is to help my students arrive at a sympathetic understanding of key Chinese concepts and metaphors. I find that they are better able to take Chinese claims seriously when they have first experienced an internal critique of philosophic assumptions that they have always taken for granted. After ZAAM, the course proceeds as many early China courses do, via a close reading of the primary texts in translation. This year, for the first time, I have added a series of articles selected from recent commentators. Aside from elucidating the texts, I wanted these articles to provide students with a sense that Confucian and Taoist ideas have current applicability. This is why I end the semester with three brief articles on Confucianism and Ecology.

Course Objectives: This course will examine some of the central concepts and metaphors in Chinese Confucianism and Taoism. We will proceed via a close reading of texts from the classical and medieval periods. Our goal will be to arrive at a sympathetic understanding of the major themes in Chinese thought. Periodically we will compare questions raised in China to questions raised within the western philosophic and religious traditions.

Who is this course designed for? This course is designed for students with an interest in Chinese intellectual traditions regardless of their major area of study. It should be particularly useful for students who are

majoring or minoring in philosophy and religion as it will provide them with a comparative perspective from which to better view western philosophical and religious thought.

Reading philosophy in translation. All of the Chinese material read in this course will be in translation. This is not unusual since most philosophy and religion courses require students to read original works in translation. Nevertheless, translations from Chinese are more difficult than from Greek (for example) because the metaphors are often new to Western readers. Since every translation is always an interpretation we will often read two or more translations of each text.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and Participation: Class attendance and participation are mandatory in this seminar style course. Attendance will be taken daily. More than 2 *unexcused* absences will result in grade reductions according to the following scale:

3 absences - 1/3 grade

4 absences - 2/3 grade

5 absences - full grade

6 absences - F for the course

Students should come to class having read the materials carefully, ready to ask and answer questions that will help us all to better understand the material.

Short Papers: There will be one 2-page and three 4-page papers. These papers are designed to give students an opportunity to bring clarity to their thinking about the material we are covering in class. Due dates are firm, and are listed in the schedule below.

Eight-Page Paper: This end-of-the-semester project provides an opportunity to develop synoptic and synthetic reflections about the material we have read throughout the semester. It should address the work of at least three of the authors examined in class, and may include substantive discussion of material studied in other courses. This paper is due at the end of exam week.

Intellectual Journal and Sagehood Discussion List:

Electronic/Intellectual Journal: Each student will maintain an Electronic Intellectual Journal.

Journal entries will be submitted to the instructor via electronic mail, and are due by midnight on Friday of each week.

While entries may vary in length, they should normally contain at least two or three paragraphs (approximately 200 words). Weekly submissions should contain at least **one** entry.

The aim of this exercise is to give students an opportunity to formulate in writing their own reflective responses to the material we are reading without having to develop those ideas into a fully argued paper.

A successful entry journal will:

- a. begin with an interesting and accurate description of some aspect of a text we have read *and*
- b. develop critical reflections on the material.

These journals are *not* an opportunity for general or personal reflections. Students should keep their entries focused on the texts. The instructor will post at least two entries to the electronic discussion list each week.

Sagehood Discussion List: The discussion list will provide an informal setting for exploring questions not fully addressed in class and for discussing some of the practical implications of Chinese thought. The instructor will monitor and occasionally participate in the discussion, but the list is intended to be primarily a student-centered forum.

Grading Policy: Classroom and Discussion List contributions 30%

Short Papers 40%

Final Paper 30%

Grading will be on the following basis: "C" means satisfactory. "C" work fulfills the assignment; each individual sentence is clear and grammatical and one sentence leads logically to the next. Judgements are well founded. "B" work fulfills all the requirements of "C" work and develops judgments or assessments that are particularly astute. "A" work fulfills all the requirements of "B" work and demonstrates a profound understanding of the themes of this course and an ability to communicate that understanding through creative use of language and a vivid sense of detail. "D" work shows little grasp of the readings and concepts of the course, or has an abundance of errors in grammar, punctuation, or spelling. "F" work fails to fulfill the assignment; or displays a slap-dash approach to the assignment or is filled with errors of spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Any short paper that is graded at C+ or lower may be rewritten and resubmitted in the following week. *Resubmitted papers will be held to a higher standard. To raise the grade a resubmitted paper will have to be **substantially** improved.*

Tentative Schedule of Reading Assignments

Reading assignments should be prepared for discussion on the days indicated.

January/February

Wed 1/27 Introduction - no readings

Fri. 29 *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* Part I

Mon 2/1 *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* Part II

Wed. 3 *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* Part III

TWO PAGE PAPER DUE

Mon. 8 *Intellectual Foundations of China*, pp 1-46

"The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature"
by Tu Wei-ming from *Confucian Thought* pp 35-50 (on reserve)

Wed. 10 *The Analects* Introductory Material pp 13-68

The Analects bks 1-3 pp 83-101

Fri. 12 *The Analects* bks 4-6 pp 102-122

"Jen as Living Metaphor in the Confucian Analects"
by Tu Wei-ming from *Confucian Thought* pp 81-92 (on reserve)

Mon. 15 No class - President's Day

Wed. 17 *The Analects* bks 7-10 pp 123-152

Fri. 19 *The Analects* bks 11-15 pp 153-201

Mon. 22 *The Analects*

Wed. 24 *Intellectual Foundations of China* pp 77-83

Mo Tzu, *Sourcebook* pp 211-231

Fri. 26 Mo Tzu, *Sourcebook* pp 211-231

FOUR PAGE PAPER DUE

March

Mon 1 *Intellectual Foundations of China* pp 46-54

"The Idea of the Human in Mencian Thought"
by Tu Wei-ming from *Confucian Thought* pp 93-112 (on reserve)

Mencius bks I and II pp 49-94

Wed 3 *Mencius* bks I and II pp 49-94

Fri. 5 *Mencius* bks III and IV pp 95-137

Mon. 8 *Mencius* bks V, VI, and VII pp 139-204

Wed. 10 *Mencius*

Fri. 12 "Great Learning" and "Doctrine of the Mean" *Sourcebook* pp 84-114

Centrality and Commonality pp 1-37

Mon. 15 *Centrality and Commonality* pp 39-92

"Doctrine of the Mean" *Sourcebook*

Wed. 17 *Centrality and Commonality* pp 92-122

"Doctrine of the Mean" *Sourcebook*

Fri. 19 *Intellectual Foundations of China* pp 59-73

The Tao of the Tao Te Ching pp 190-254

Four Page Paper Due

Mon. 22 "The Origins of the Legend of Lao Tan" by A.C. Graham

and "The Lao-tzu Myth" from *Lao Tzu and the Tao Te Ching*
by Livia Kohn pp 23-62 (on reserve)

The Tao of the Tao Te Ching pp tba

Wed. 24 *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching* pp tba

Fri. 26 *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching* pp tba

Mon. 29 *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching* pp tba

Wed. 31 No Class - Spring Recess

April

Fri. 4//2 No Class - Spring Recess

Mon. 5 No Class - Spring Recess

Wed. 7 No Class - Spring Recess

Fri. 9 No Class - Spring Recess

Mon. 12 *Intellectual Foundations of China* pp 73-76

"From Yangism to Chuang Tzu's Taoism" by A.C. Graham in
Disputers of the Tao pp 170-210 (on reserve)

Wed. 14 *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*

Fri. 16 *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*

Mon. 19 *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*

Wed. 21 *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*

Fri. 23 *Intellectual Foundations of China* pp 54-58

Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings Introduction pp 1-14;

"Man's Nature is Evil" pp 157-171

Four Page Paper Due

Mon. 26 *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings* pp tba

Wed. 28 *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings* pp tba

Fri. 30 *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings* pp tba

May

Mon. 5/3 "Between Chen and Cai: *Zhuangzi* and the *Analects*" by John Makeham in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi* pp 75-100 (on reserve)

Wed. 5 "Transformational Humor in the *Zhuangzi*" by James D. Sellmann in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi* pp 163-75 (on reserve)

Fri. 7 "Beyond the Enlightenment Mentality" by Tu Wei-ming in *Confucianism and Ecology* pp 3-22 (on reserve)

Mon 10 "Early Confucianism and Environmental Ethics by P.J. Ivanhoe

Confucianism and Ecology pp 59-76 (on reserve)

Wed 12 "Companionship with the World: Roots and Branches of a Confucian Ecology," by Rodney Taylor *Confucianism and Ecology* pp 3-22 (on reserve)

Required Texts

Chan, W.T. *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1963)

Chan's Sourcebook contains partial translations of all the most important Chinese philosophical works. Throughout his translation, Chan was concerned to use language that would link easily with Western philosophical topics. Thus, while his translations are useful for this class, they need to be read in conjunction with other translations

LaFargue, Michael, tr., *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching* (SUNY Press, 1992)

This new translation of the *Tao Te Ching* contains a wealth of annotations and comments that help situate this classic Taoist text in its social and intellectual setting. (To be read in conjunction with Chan's translation in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*.)

Lau, D.C., tr., *Mencius* (Penguin, 1970)

With the possible exception of Confucius there is no single Chinese thinker whose influence is more pervasive than Mencius. He is responsible for codifying the Confucian conviction that humankind is born with innate tendencies toward "human heartedness" which, if cultivated properly, will enable us to become full partners with Heaven and Earth. (To be read in conjunction with Chan's translation in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*.)

Mote, Frederick, *Intellectual Foundations of China 2nd ed.* (Knopf, 1989)

This short introduction to Chinese intellectual history is designed to orient students to the major themes in Chinese thought and should be read in conjunction with the primary texts we are discussing in class.

Pirsig, Robert, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Bantam, 1974)

Though this philosophical novel has almost nothing to say about Buddhism or Chinese thought it is a very useful tool for problematizing a set of assumptions that most western students bring to the study of religion and philosophy. While many assume the validity of the Enlightenment's division of facts from values, Chinese philosophy makes no such assumptions. Pirsig's critique of western thought, and his conviction that Quality ought to be an ontological category, resonates well with Confucian and Taoist assumptions about the Tao.

Tu, Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (SUNY Press, 1989)

Tu Wei-ming is perhaps the most influential contemporary Confucian teaching and writing in the west. This short book is actually an extended meditation on the *Doctrine of the Mean (Chung Yung)*. It provides an insightful analysis of this central Confucian text and at the same time demonstrates how Confucian thinking could be an important resource for contemporary life.

Waley, Arthur, tr, *The Analects of Confucius* (Vintage, 1989)

Waley's 1938 translation of the most widely read and memorized book in China is well regarded and a good counterpart to Chan's more philosophically oriented translation.

Watson, Burton tr. *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings* (Columbia Univ. Press, reprint 1996)

A translation of the central writings of Chuang Tzu. Chuang Tzu is the liveliest, funniest, and perhaps the most sarcastic of the classical Taoist thinkers. As a result he is sometimes difficult to follow, but always worth the effort. (To be read in conjunction with Chan's translation in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*.)

Watson, Burton, tr. *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings* (Columbia University Press, reprint 1996)

A translation of the central writings of Hsün Tzu, the Confucian who argued contrary to Mencius that humankind is born with a natural tendency toward evil which must be removed through rigorous training and ritual practices. To be read in conjunction with Chan's translation in *A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*.)

Recommended Texts

Hall, David A. and Ames, Roger T. *Anticipating China* (SUNY Press, 1995)

This book is a provocative attempt to identify and examine western philosophical assumptions that interfere with any attempt to understand Chinese philosophy and religion. The authors argue that the western tradition opted to give preference to permanence over change, transcendence over immanence, cognition over feeling, causal logic over correlative logic. These preferences inevitably interfere with an attempt to understand Chinese writers who often choose to emphasize change over permanence, immanence over transcendence, cognition over feeling, and correlation over causality. This book is especially recommended for philosophy majors who find themselves wondering why the Chinese texts sound so strange!