

# Phil 179 – Asian Philosophy: Conceptions of the Good Life

UCLA Summer 2023 (A Session)

TR 3:15pm-5:20pm in Rolfe Hall 3134

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**Office Hours:** Th 12:30pm-2:30pm  
**Office:** Dodd 343 and [on zoom](#)

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## Course Description

What is required for living a good life? How can we be freed from suffering? What should we do to obtain happiness? We will investigate this nexus of questions in three major schools of Asian philosophy: Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. As we will see, for each of these schools, the study of philosophy has immensely practical import – it provides a rubric for how to live well.

In our first unit, we will unpack the central role of ritual and tradition in Confucius' picture of the good life and learn about Mencius's understanding of the relation between human nature and self-cultivation. In our second unit, we will read from the two major Daoist works, the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. We will try to get a handle on the Daoist view that the good life involves "obtaining *dao*," or The Way, and results in "effortless action." In our third and final unit, we will see how Buddhism diagnoses the root of all suffering as false belief in the self. We will look at Buddhist arguments against the existence of the self and examine the soteriological benefits that come from viewing both the self and experience as empty.

For more details, see tentative schedule below.

## Course Goals

Beyond giving an overview of central themes in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, this course is intended to *promote recognition and reflection on philosophy's practical import*. The primary goal is that we come to appreciate philosophy as something which not only can help us build models for understanding the world, but also can help guide our ways of being in the world. In pursuit of this goal, we will routinely work to relate the texts and ideas to our own experiences.

Additionally, a large portion of our efforts will be directed at learning to *analyze difficult philosophical texts*. All of the academic works we will read are primary texts. We will frequently spend class time engaged in close readings. Through reading reflections and paper assignments, we will gain practice actively working with the ideas as we read.

## Course Materials

- All materials will be posted to the course website. We will not use a textbook.

## Course Policies

### Discussion Expectations:

- In order to facilitate worthwhile philosophical discussion, it will be important that everyone abide by the **Principle of Charity (POC)**:

Interpret a speaker's statements in the most persuasive way possible, so as to render those statements rational and worthy of philosophical engagement.

- In other words, give everyone you interact with the benefit of the doubt. A student following the POC, for example, would not speak over their fellow students or be outright dismissive of the points they're intending to convey. The primary aim of the POC is to ensure a respectful, worthwhile, and collaborative intellectual environment. All students will be expected to act in ways that further these aims.

### Participation:

- Participation is **highly** encouraged (and part of your grade). Philosophy classes work best when everyone talks. So, pose questions to the class, attempt to answer questions from one another, and generally engage with your fellow classmates.
- Come to office hours! Office hours can be an immensely helpful way to digest and work with the material. Moreover, coming to office hours will count as a form of participation.

### Attendance and Lecture Recordings:

- Under normal circumstances, you are expected to attend class and actively participate in discussion. If you are unable to attend class, email me and I will audio record that day's class.

### Academic Honesty:

- Students are expected to know and to follow the University's guidelines for academic honesty. Academic misconduct can occur in a variety of ways, including (but not limited to) cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism. Any suspected violation of university policy regarding academic conduct will be reported directly to the Office of the Dean of Students.
- The UCLA Student Conduct Code states, "Unless otherwise specified by the faculty member, all submissions, whether in draft or final form, to meet course requirements (including a paper, project, exam, computer program, oral presentation, or other work) must either be the Student's own work, or must clearly acknowledge the source." As stated by CAT, "the use of ChatGPT or other AI tools for course assignments is akin to receiving assistance from another person and raises the same concern that work is not the student's own."
- When in doubt about whether some academic practice is acceptable, ask me for assistance *in advance of submitting your assignment*. Always err on the side of avoiding academic misconduct.
- Below are links to UCLA's policies on academic and intellectual integrity:  
<https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/studentconductcode>  
<https://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Academic-Integrity>

## Accessibility & Accommodations:

- Any students seeking disability services please register with the CAE as soon as possible. If you are already registered and require assistance for the quarter, please release your accommodation letters by the end of week one.
- Here is a link to the University's Center for Accessible Education (CAE): <http://www.cae.ucla.edu/>. They are also available at (310) 825-1501.
- More generally, if you are experiencing difficulty (health-related, financial, other), please reach out to me. I will try my best to figure out how we can best navigate the course under the circumstances.

## Assignments & Grading

### Assignments:

- **Participation:** Participation will take many forms in this class, including the following: asking questions, answering questions, participating in discussions and in-class activities, and coming to office hours. Note that besides coming to office hours, each of these forms of participation requires *attending class*. You will not receive a high participation grade if you miss a significant number of classes.

- **Reading reflections:** You are required to complete *four* reading reflections during the course of the term. I will distribute guidelines for these reflections separately. Reading reflections will be graded anonymously.

Reading reflections will be due Sunday nights at 11:59pm. You cannot submit more than one each week. (So, you cannot submit all four the last week of the term). Each reading reflection for a given week must reflect that week's readings (Sunday being the last day of the week). For example, if you submit a reflection on Sunday, July 2nd, it should concern the readings for class for either Tuesday, June 27th or Thursday, June 29th. Again, you only need to write four reflections, so while they will be due every week, you can skip two weeks of your choosing.

- **Papers:** There will be two papers. The first will be 3-4 pages and the second will be 4-5 pages. Prompts and instructions for these papers will be released at least one week in advance of the deadline. Papers will be graded anonymously.

### Late Policy for Papers:

- Papers that are turned in late will be docked 1/3 of a letter grade for each 48-hour period late. For example, a B will be lowered to a B- if the assignment is within 48 hours late.
- Things come up and I understand that. I will be *extremely generous* in granting short extensions if they are requested *in advance* of the deadline. I will *not* be generous in granting extensions requested *after* the deadline. Following this guideline will help to ensure fairness in the grading process.

### Grade Breakdown:

- Participation (15%)
- Reading reflections (20% - each reflection is worth 5%)
- First paper (25%)
- Second paper (35%)

# Tentative Schedule

Please note that this schedule is subject to change. Consult the Modules page of course website for the most up-to-date information.

## Unit One: Confucianism

### • Week One

- Lecture One: *Introduction and Overview*
  - \* Watch one of the following:
    - [Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi - "Flow, the secret to happiness"](#) Ted (2004)
    - [David Steindl-Rast - "Want to be happy? Be grateful"](#) Ted (2013)
    - [Srikumar Rao - "Plug into your hard-wired happiness"](#) Ted (2010)
  - \* Read one of the following:
    - Kira Newman: "Is Social Connection the Best Path to Happiness?" *Greater Good Magazine* (2018)
    - Penny Locaso: "What You Were Taught About 'Happiness' Isn't True," *Harvard Business Review* (2021)
    - Robert Puff: "The Secret to Happiness," *Psychology Today* (2021)
- Lecture Two: *Confucius on Tradition and Ritual*
  - \* Kongzi: *The Analects*, pp. 1-55 in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000)

### • Week Two

- Lecture One: No Class - July 4th Holiday
- Lecture Two: *Mengzi (Mencius) on Human Nature*
  - \* Mengzi: *The Mengzi*, pp. 111-153 in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000)

## Unit Two: Daoism

### • Week Three

- Lecture One: *An Introduction to Laozi*
  - \* Laozi: *Daodejing*, §§ 1-40, pp. 157-179 in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000)
- Lecture Two: *Laozi cont.*
  - \* Laozi: *Daodejing*, §§ 41-84, pp. 179-200 in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000)

### • Week Four

- Lecture One: *Zhuangzi's Inner Chapters*
  - \* Zhuangzi: *The Zhuangzi*, Chapters 1-7, pp. 203-236 in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000)
- Lecture Two: *Zhuangzi's Outer and Miscellaneous Chapters*

- \* *The Zhuangzi*, Chapters 13, 22, 23, and 26, pp. 237-243 in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2000)

Friday, July 21st @ 11:59pm: Paper One Due

### Unit Three: Buddhism

- **Week Five**

- Lecture One: *Introduction to Buddhist No-Self Arguments*
  - \* Saṃyutta Nikāya III. 66–68, trans. Mark Siderits in *Buddhism as Philosophy* (2021)
  - \* *The Questions of King Milinda*, trans. Mark Siderits in *Buddhism as Philosophy* (2021)
- Lecture Two: *Vasubandhu on the Negation of Persons*
  - \* *The Nyāya-sūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries*, Chapter 4
  - \* Vasubandhu: *Treatise on the Negation of the Person*, §§7 in *Reason's Traces* (2001)

- **Week Six**

- Lecture One: *Nāgārjuna on Emptiness*
  - \* Nāgārjuna: *Fundamental Stanzas on the Middle Way*, Chapters 1 and 24 in *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (2013)
- Lecture Two: Wrapping Up
  - \* TBD

Friday, August 4th @ 11:59pm: Paper Two Due

## University Resources

- The Center for Accessible Education (CAE): <https://www.cae.ucla.edu/> or (310) 825-1501
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): <https://www.caps.ucla.edu/> or (310) 825-0768
- CARE: Advocacy Office for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Misconduct: <https://careprogram.ucla.edu/> or (310) 206-2465 (24 Hour Crisis Counseling (888) 200-6665)
- UCLA Writing Programs: <http://www.wp.ucla.edu/>

Last updated: 6/27/23