

Conceptions of Freedom in Classical Chinese Philosophy

YHU 2327/Philosophy
Semester 1, AY 2021-22
Mondays and Thursdays, 4:00-5:30p.m.

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Office hours: Mondays and Thursdays, 1:30-3:30 p.m. (Please make an appointment in advance via: <https://calendly.com/christine-tan-office-hours/consultation>)

Pre-requisite:

YCC1113 Philosophy and Political Thought 1; or with the permission of the instructor.

Course Rationale:

Freedom is a value cherished by most, and yet it is defined in almost as many ways as there are people defining it. In the context of Chinese philosophy, specifically, it has caused some controversial debate—that is, whether or not it even exists, and if so, how different it might be from mainstream liberal conceptions.

This course will provide a survey of the different conceptions of freedom in Classical Chinese Philosophy. We will examine different classical political philosophers in China through the notion of freedom, and in turn, also reflect on common cultural tropes about Chinese intellectual history. We will do this by thinking through the nature of the individual self, the existence of human will, and the relation of that self to society via varying Chinese intellectual traditions, ranging from Confucianism and Daoism to Legalism among others. At the end of the course, students are expected to have acquired a critical awareness of the differing and diverse perspectives of Chinese philosophers on the question of metaphysical and political freedom.

Assessments:

First essay (1000 words; 20% of your final grade)

Your first essay is a “critical analysis” essay. You are expected to summarise and critically analyse an argument made by your chosen author or philosopher from unit 2.

This is **due Thursday 9 September, 11:59p.m.**

Second essay (800 words; 15% of your final grade)

Your second essay is a “position piece.” You are expected here to choose a position (agree, disagree, or a mixture of both) regarding your chosen philosopher or scholar’s argument from unit 3. Please refrain from lengthy summaries (as permitted in the first essay) as this is a short essay. Make sure to also anticipate objections.

This is **due Thursday, 14 October, 11:59p.m.**

Third essay (2500 words; 35% of your final grade)

Your third and final essay is your term paper, which is the culmination of what you have learned during the course. This is a formal research paper, so you are expected to critically engage with ideas discussed during the course, as well as

evaluate them, in order to make your own thesis and defend it with textual and logical support.

This is **due Thursday, 25 November**

Seminar presentation (10% of your final grade)

Each seminar participant will give one presentation on the reading for that day's seminar. Presenters are required to write and prepare a hand-out which will be pre-circulated at least 24-hours in-advance of the scheduled presentation.

Seminar participation (20% of your final grade)

As this is a small seminar course, your full participation is expected. However, do ensure that your engagements are informed, prepared, and respectful. Do also note that being able to listen to, as well as meaningfully respond to, what others are saying is an important part of participating in a conversation.

Required Books:

Graham, A C. *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*. La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989. [DT]

Ziporyn, Brook (trans). *Zhuangzi: the essential writings with selections from traditional commentaries*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 2009. [ZZ]

Readings and Schedule:

Week 1, starting 9 August

Orientation and Introduction to the Course

Unit 1: Contextualisations

Week 2, starting 16 August

M: Berlin, Isaiah. "Two Concepts of Liberty." In *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*, edited by Henry Hardy. New York, USA: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. 166-217 (e-reserve)

Th: Tan, Christine Abigail L. 2020. "Freedom as Self-Realization: Zide in the Neo-Daoist Philosophy of Guo Xiang." *Nanyang Technological University*. <https://doi.org/10.32657/10356/148932>. Pp. 5-14 (e-reserve)

Unit 2: The Progenitors

Week 3, starting 23 August: Confucius

M: Confucius, *Analects*, ch. 1-5 (e-reserve); Great Learning (<http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/greatlearning.html>), Doctrine of the Mean, ch. 1-15 (<http://www.acmuller.net/con-dao/docofmean.html>)

Th: Graham, A C. DT ch. I. 1. Pp. 9-32

Week 4, starting 30 August: Confucian Freedom's Contemporary Iterations

M: Li, Chenyang. 2014. "The Confucian Conception of Freedom." *Philosophy East and West* 64 (4): 902-19. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.2014.0066>.

Th: Tan, Sor-hoon. 2012. "Democracy in Confucianism." *Philosophy Compass* 7 (5): 293-303. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2012.00481.x>.

Week 5, starting 6 September: Laozi

M: Graham, A C., DT ch. III. 1., pp. 215-234

Th: Chan, Alan K.L. 1998. "A Tale of Two Commentaries: Ho-shang-kung and Wang Pi on the Lao-tzu," in *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching*, edited by Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue, Albany: State University of New York Press, 89–117. (e-reserve)

First essay due Thursday 9 September, 11:59p.m.

Unit 3: The Metaphysics of Political Freedom

Week 6, starting 13 September: Mengzi

M: Graham, A C., DT ch. II. 1., pp. 111-132

Th: Hung, Andrew Tsz Wan. "Mencius and Berlin on Freedom" *Philosophy East and West*. Published electronically January 12, 2021.

<https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.0.0211>.

RECESS WEEK: Saturday, 18 September – Sunday, 26 September

Week 7, starting 27 September: Xunzi

M: Graham, A C., DT ch. III.2. Pp. 235-255

Th: Tao, Jiang. 2011. "Two Notions of Freedom in Classical Chinese Thought: The Concept of Hua 化 in the Zhuangzi and the Xunzi." *Dao* 10 (4): 463–86.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11712-011-9245-y>.

Week 8, starting 4 October: Zhuangzi

M: ZZ, ch. 1 and 2 (see also: commentaries)

Th: ZZ ch. 3 and 4 (see also: commentaries)

Week 9, starting 11 October:

M: Tao, Jiang. 2012. "Isaiah Berlin's Challenge to the Zhuangzian Freedom." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 39 (December): 69–92.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6253.12004>.

Th: Valmisa, Mercedes. 2019. "The Happy Slave Isn't Free: Relational Autonomy and Freedom in The Zhuangzi." *Philosophy Compass* 14 (3): e12569.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12569>.

Second essay due Thursday, 14 October, 11:59p.m.

Unit 4: Social and Political Autonomy

Week 10, starting 18 October: Yangzhu

M: Graham, A C., DT ch. I.3. Pp. 53-63

Th: Emerson, John. 1996. "Yang Chu's Discovery of the Body." *Philosophy East and West* 46 (4): 533. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1399495>.

Week 11, starting 25: The Agriculturists

M: Graham, A C., DT ch. I.4. Pp. 64-74

Th: Graham, A. C. "The "Nung-chia" 農家 'School of the Tillers' and the Origins of Peasant Utopianism in China." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 42, no. 1 (1979): 66-100. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/614828>.

Week 12, starting 1 November: Mozi and the Legalists

M: Graham, A C., DT ch. I.2. Pp. 41-51; Graham, A C., DT ch. III.3. Pp. 267-282

Th: Deepavali

Unit 5: Conclusion

Week 13, starting 8 November: Concluding Reflections

Final Essay due Thursday, 25 November, 11:59p.m.

Course Policies:

1. Academic dishonesty is strictly prohibited. Plagiarism and cheating in any form will not be tolerated and will result in an automatic failing grade. Please cite all your sources, whether directly quoted or paraphrased. Do familiarize yourself with Yale-NUS's policies on academic integrity to know more: <http://studentlife.yale-nus.edu.sg/policies/academic-integrity/>
2. As our seminar is small and requires engaged discussion, you are expected to attend and participate in all seminar meetings. Absences will be disruptive and will affect your participation grade on a sliding scale.
3. Informed, and even intense, philosophical debates are usually encouraged, but please remember to conduct yourselves with civility and propriety during discussions and other engagements. Personal attacks (*ad hominem*) ought to be refrained from at all times.
4. Please refrain from using your laptops, tablet computers, smartphones, or other electronic devices during the seminars. If you prefer to go paperless, you may take handwritten notes on a tablet in airplane mode (with special permission from the instructor).
5. Please observe the prescribed deadline for the submission of all your requirements. Late submissions are accepted with an Assistant Dean's note; otherwise, it will be docked one step (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) per day.

The instructor reserves the right to modify this syllabus at her discretion.