

## Lecture 8

### Confucius

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## China vs. India

- Separated by a gigantic mountain range
- Low degree of cultural commonality
- No significant interaction until 1st century CE:
  - Buddhist missionaries arrive in China from India
  - Previous Chinese thought dominated by Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism, and Legalism



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## Different Philosophical Goals

- Most Indian philosophical thought aims at *moksha*
  - *moksha* = liberation from the world
  - other-worldly focus
- Most native Chinese philosophical thought aims at *he*
  - *he* = harmony within the world
    - Confucianism focuses on social harmony
    - Daoism focuses on natural harmony
  - no focus on afterlife or other lives



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## Different Styles of Argument

- Indian philosophy is *confrontational*
  - aims to refute opposing points of view
  - aims to prove correctness of one's own view
- Chinese philosophy is *cooperative and inclusive*
  - aims to absorb opposing points of views
  - aims to show that one's own view is more complete
    - persuasion without confrontation

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## Different Styles of Instruction

- Indian philosophy propagates through a *school* tradition
  - Each philosophical position has its own school
- One becomes a philosopher by being a disciple in a school of thought
  - One learns philosophy through mastery of abstract concepts and logical reasoning
- Chinese philosophy propagates through a *sage* tradition
  - Rival groups are named by leader, community, or place
  - not by their main ideas
- One becomes a philosopher by being an apprentice in a community of thinkers
  - One learns philosophy by modeling oneself after a paradigm
  - more inter-personal than Indian style

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## Confucius



- Kong-fu-zi
  - "Master Kong"
  - Real Name: Kong Qui
- 551-479 BCE
- Born in a time of social and political turmoil
  - Zhou dynasty losing control
  - Many small kingdoms warring for territory and power
  - Result: Massive disorder

孔 Kǒng  
夫 fū  
子 zǐ

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## Realism/Legalism

- Strictly enforce laws to control all aspects of human behavior
- Amoral
  - no concern for good or fair or just laws
  - law is acceptable if ...
- Key Assumption: persons are naturally inclined to do wrong
  - laws are designed to ...



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## Mohism

- Founder: Mozi
- Everyone is to be loved without distinction
  - because love allows humans to harmonize with each other, in accordance with the intrinsically harmonious universe
- Universal love brings the greatest benefit to all
  - underlying cause of unhappiness is ...
  - consequentialism



"When all the people in the world love one another, the strong will not be overcome by the weak, the many will not oppress the few, the rich will not insult the poor, the honored will not despise the humble, and the cunning will not deceive the ignorant."

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## Confucius's Criticisms

- Laws only change superficial behaviors
  - laws do not address underlying cause of disorder, hence do not promote long-term stability
- Society should only enforce laws that are fair
- Mohists are impractical
  - love is unreliable
  - it is easy to take advantage of those who love
  - some conflicts are inevitable

If you try to lead the common people with governmental regulations and keep them in line with punishments, the laws will simply be evaded and the people will have no sense of shame.

If, however, you guide them by Virtue, and keep them in line by means of ritual, the people will have a sense of shame and will moreover reform themselves.

-*Analects* 2.3

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## Confucius's Solution

- The way to restore political and social order is to develop the moral character of citizens
    - training the youth to be wise and altruistic public servants makes moral behavior habitual
      - no need for laws
    - training also develops the character of citizens
      - promotes long-term stability
      - makes people happy as a side effect
  - and there is already a model for how to train people in the appropriate way
    - the traditions of the Zhou dynasty
- The ancients who wished to manifest their clear character to the world would first bring order to their states.
- Those who wished to bring order to their states would first regulate their families.
- Those who wished to regulate their families would first cultivate their personal lives.
- The Great Learning*

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## Confucius's Program

- *Step One*: Understand the basic human relationships
  - Each relationship is binary, recursive, and hierarchical
  - There are duties in both directions
    - subordinate owes ...
    - superior owes ...
- There are six basic human relationships
  - ruler-subject
  - parent-child
  - older (sibling)- younger (sibling)
  - husband-wife
  - (older) friend- (younger) friend
  - teacher-student
    - not always included as a "basic" relationship

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## Confucius's Program

- *Step Two*: Use the basic relationships as guides to how one ought to act
    - what one ought to do follows from ...
    - no sharp separation between fact and value
    - no universal rule: obligations are contextual
- A student should be filial toward his parents when at home and respectful toward his elders when abroad.
- Careful in action and truthful in speech, he should display an expansive care for the multitude and seek to draw nearer those who are humane.
- Analects 1.6*

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## Confucius's Program

- *Step Three:*  
**Rectification of Names**

- be true to the name of one's position in any given relation
- bring one's character and actions into agreement with normative ideals built into names of basic relationships
- this will lead to social order and harmony

Let the ruler be a ruler, the minister a minister, the father a father, the son a son.

- *Analects* 12.11;  
also see 13.3

It is unlikely that one who has grown up as a filial son and respectful younger brother will then be inclined to defy his superiors, and there has never been a case of one who is disinclined to follow his superiors stirring up a rebellion.

-*Analects* 1.2

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## Confucius's Philosophy

- Confucius's writings are not systematic.
  - The *Analects*, for example, are a collection of sayings, gathered together after Confucius died, and put in no particular order
- Confucius also has a tendency to not argue for his claims.
- Our Approach: Examine the meaning of key terms that recur in his writings.

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## Confucian Terms

1. **Tian** = heaven / the heavens

- the way the world is
- there is a master blueprint for everything
- Confucian thought aims to bring thoughts and actions into conformity with this blueprint
  - not acting in accordance with *tian* results in disorder
  - acting in accordance with *tian* allows world to function appropriately

- o *The Character:* Start with a stick-figure of a person with a big head (to symbolize the power of the sky). Then draw the head as a horizontal line instead of a circle. The character is drawn in four strokes.

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## Confucian Terms

### 2. Ren = human-ness, humaneness, benevolence

- how one should treat other human beings
- a way of developing and expressing oneself as a genuine person
- what it is to be a "true" or "genuine" human being
- what it is to live up to one's potential as a human

- o *The Character:* Start with a lower-case cursive "i" without the dot (to symbolize a person). Lower one stroke, to obtain the left portion of the character. Add two horizontal lines (symbolizing two). The character is drawn in four strokes.
- o "feeling between two people"

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## Confucian Terms

- How to be *ren* varies from person to person
- The way to be *ren* is to ...
- Being *ren* involves ...
  - Confucian Golden Rule



One who is *ren* sees as his first priority the hardship of self-cultivation, and does not think about attaining any results or rewards.

- Analects 6.22

When in public, comport yourself as if you were receiving an important guest; in your management of the people, behave as if you were overseeing a great sacrifice. **Do not impose upon others what you yourself do not desire.** In this way, you will encounter no resentment in your state or in your family.

- Analects 12.2

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## Confucian Terms

### 3. Li = rites, ritual, propriety

- guides for how to behave in various situations
- when one acts appropriately in the situation one is in, one's life and relationships go more smoothly, because ...

- o *The Character:* The right character symbolizes a vessel or a ritual vessel.

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## Confucian Terms

- Confucius considers following the rule of *li* to be a means for realizing one's full human potential

- evidence: past experience
- following rituals also allows one to tame unruly impulses, transforming them into civilized behaviors

- The rituals themselves are not important: what is important is ...

When the ruler loves ritual propriety, then none among the people will dare to be disrespectful. When the ruler loves rightness, then none among the people will dare not to obey. When the ruler loves trustworthiness, then none among the people will dare not to be honest.

The mere existence of such a ruler would cause people throughout the world to bundle their children on their backs and seek him out.

- Analects 13.4

Artful speech and ingratiating demeanor rarely accompany ren.

- Analects 1.3

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## Confucian Terms

### 4. Xiao = filial piety (heartfelt, not formal)

- virtue of reverence and respect for one's parents
- *xiao* should extend to actions outside of one's family

In serving your parents you may gently remonstrate with them. However, once it becomes apparent that they have not taken your criticism to heart you should be respectful and not oppose them, and follow their lead diligently without resentment.

- Analects 4.18



- o *The Character:* Below the diagonal line, the lower-case "t" with an odd top symbolizes a child. Above the diagonal (inc. the horizontal line that slices the diagonal) is an abbreviated form of the character for "aged parent".

- o "child supporting aged parent (and child leaning on parent)"

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## Confucian Terms

### 5. Yi = righteousness

- virtue of acting in the right way at the right time
- helps one to be *ren*

The gentleman takes *yi* as his substance, then puts this substance into practice by means of ritual, gives it expression through modesty, and perfects it by being trustworthy (faithful). Now that is a gentleman!

- Analects 15.18



- o *The Character:* The top part, two dots and three horizontal lines linked with a bar, is a pictograph for a sheep with horns. The bottom part symbolizes a hand (on the left) holding a halberd (on the right).

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## Confucian Terms

6. **De** = virtue, power, excellence

- charisma that comes from being a genuine human being
- naturally makes others more genuine
- Confucius's hope is that, in training his students to be *ren*, he will provide role models that, through their charisma, will inspire others to also be *ren* -- the result will be social and political order.

德

- o *The Character*: The leftmost character symbolizes "steps": it is a pictograph of a person taking a small step. The rightmost character symbolizes "moral".
- o "moral steps"

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## Confucian Terms

7. **Junzi** = gentleman

- a way of behaving, not a social or economic status
- someone who is *ren*
- Confucius takes this to be the goal of a person's life

The gentleman understands what is right, whereas the petty man understands profit.

- *Analects* 4.16

The gentleman wishes to be slow of speech and cautious with regard to his actions.

- *Analects* 4.24

君子

He cultivates himself in order to achieve reverence. He cultivates himself in order to bring peace to others.

- *Analects* 14.44

The gentleman admires what is right most of all. A gentleman who possessed courage but lacked a sense of rightness would create great disorder, while a petty person who possessed courage but lacked a sense of rightness would become a thief or robber.

- *Analects* 17.23

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## Readings for Next Time

Kupperman, Chapter 5  
Readings, 111-155 (*Mencius*)

**Quiz #3** on February 8

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