

**Ethics: East and West**  
Instructor: Joe Nelson

Course Description

Most college-level philosophy classes, even historically-oriented ones, focus entirely on Western thinkers, leaving students without exposure to philosophy from other parts of the world. Against this trend, this course focuses on influential Asian moral philosophers in the Mohist, Confucian, and Buddhist traditions.

This course has two main goals. The first is to promote recognition of the richness of Asian moral philosophy, particularly in the realm of ethics. The second is to spark reflection on major topics in this area, such as moral obligation, moral character, personal identity, and free will.

To that end, we will read three kinds of texts: primary texts from classical and Buddhist Asian philosophers (in translation), contemporary Western scholarship on those philosophers, and contemporary Western moral philosophy that deals with similar themes. In engaging with this work, students will gain an appreciation for the distinct ways in which Asian philosophers dealt with questions of enduring, cross-cultural philosophical interest.

Each week of the course will be broken into two phases: an exegetical phase, in which we extract the major ideas and arguments from that week's texts; and a "symposium" phase, in which students prepare short responses to these ideas and arguments, read each other's responses, and discuss them in class, with priority decided ahead of time by class vote.

Grading will be based on symposium participation and on three papers (one for each of the themes below). In each paper, students will select a primary text, reconstruct its central argument, and offer their own critical response.

Course Themes and Readings

**1. Impartial Care (*jian ai*, 兼愛) vs. Partial Duties**

Primary Texts

- Kongzi (Confucius), *Analects* book 15.
- Mozi ch. 14-16 ("Universal Love"), ch. 39 ("Against the Confucians").
- Mengzi books 1-3.
- Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* chapter 8, verses 90-109.

Secondary Scholarship

- Wai Wai Chiu, "Jian ai and the Mohist attack of Early Confucianism", *Philosophy Compass* 8 (2013).
- Kwong-loi Shun, "Mencius' Criticism of Mohism: An Analysis of 'Meng Tzu' 3A: 5", *Philosophy East and West* 41 (1991).

- Charles Goodman, “Śāntideva's Impartialist Ethics”, in Ganeri ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Indian Philosophy* (2017).

#### Western Ethics

- J.J.C. Smart, “Introduction”, “Utilitarianism and the Future” and “Utilitarianism and Justice”, in *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (1973).
- Bernard Williams, “Persons, Character, and Morality”, in Rachels ed. *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980*.
- Michael Stocker, “The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories”, *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976).

## 2. Human Nature and Moral Development

#### Primary Texts

- Kongzi (Confucius), *Analects* books 1-10
- *Mengzi* books 1-3, 5-7
- *Xunzi* ch. 19 (“Discourse on Ritual”) and ch. 23 (“Human Nature is Bad”)

#### Secondary Scholarship

- Irene Bloom, “Mencian Arguments on Human Nature (*Jen-hsing*)”, *Philosophy East and West* 44 (1994).
- David Wong, “Growing Virtue: The Theory and Science of Developing Compassion from a Mencian Perspective”, in Bruya (ed.), *The Philosophical Challenge from China* (2015).
- Eric L. Hutton, “Ethics in the *Xunzi*”, in Hutton ed. *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Xunzi* (2016).
- Eric Slingerland, “The Situationist Critique and Early Confucian Virtue Ethics”, *Ethics* 121 (2011).

#### Western Ethics

- Linda Zagzebski, “Exemplarist Virtue Theory”, *Metaphilosophy* (2010).
- John Doris, *Lack of Character* ch. 4 “The Fragmentation of Character” (2003).
- Jesse Prinz, “Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?” in Coplan and Goldie ed. *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (2011).

## 3. Free Will and Personal Identity

#### Primary Texts

- Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* ch. 9 (“Examination of the Prior Entity”), ch. 17 (“Examination of Actions and Their Fruits”), and ch. 18 (“Examination of Self and Entities”)
- Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośakārikā* ch. 9
- Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* ch. 6

### Secondary Scholarship

- James Giles, “The No-Self Theory: Hume, Buddhism, and Personal Identity”, *Philosophy East and West* (1993).
- Charles Goodman, “Resentment and Reality: Buddhism on Moral Responsibility”, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 39 (2002).

### Western Ethics

- Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, ch. 10 (“How We Are Not What We Believe”) and ch. 11 (“Why Our Identity Is Not What Matters”) (1984).
- Derk Pereboom, “Why We Have No Free Will and Can Live Without It”, in Feinberg and Shafer-Landau eds. *Reason and Responsibility* (2007).