

Neo-Confucian Chinese Philosophy

Spring, 2015

Syllabus

Stephen C. Angle, Wesleyan University

[Revised version for Neo-Confucianism.com website. Most logistical information has been removed.]

Course Objectives

The goals of the course are twofold: to introduce you to the central texts and themes of what has come to be called “Neo-Confucian” Chinese philosophy, and to help you to develop your ability to read, discuss, and write philosophy. Each of these goals, in turn, is related to larger and longer-term objectives. The philosophical tradition that we will explore in this course has provided much of the intellectual context for the last thousand years of Chinese — and in many cases, East Asian — culture. The course can thus serve as a foundation for further study of East Asia. At the same time, improved philosophical skills will assist you not only if you continue to study the world’s philosophical traditions, but also in any area outside philosophy in which clear analysis and careful argument play a role.

Materials

In addition to *Neo-Confucianism: A Philosophical Introduction*, students were asked to purchase the following books (all paperback):

- Tiwald and Van Norden, eds., *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy*
- Gardner, trans., *Learning to be a Sage*
- Kalton, et al., trans., *The Four-Seven Debate*
- Bloom, trans., *Knowledge Painfully Acquired*
- Kelleher, trans., *The Journal of Wu Yubi*

Additional readings listed below were made available via the course website.

Readings and Discussion Questions

Class 1: Technical Details and Historical Overview

- Course Logistics
- Chinese Language
- Classical and Post-classical Historical Background (Quiz on this at beginning of next class)

Class 2: Classical Sources

- Confucius (Kongzi)'s *Analects*, Passages 2.1-2.19
 - What strikes you as important about 2.4? How does it relate to 2.7 and 2.8?
- Mencius (*Mengzi*), Passages 2A:2, 6A:1, 6A:2, 7A:1-7
 - 2A:6 describes four "feelings" which are the "sprouts" of four corresponding virtues. Mencius says that "people's having these sprouts is like their having four limbs." What do you think of this?
 - 6A:1 and 6A:2 contain famous analogies related to Mencius's idea of human nature. In what sense is human nature "good," according to Mencius?
 - Relate 7A:1 to the previous passages.
- "The Greater Learning (*Daxue*)"
 - What does this short text tell you about the scope or aspirations of Confucian philosophy?
- Selections from Book of Changes (Qian Hexagram; Great Appendix), in *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy* (hereafter, RLCP), pp. 42-52
 - Choose three separate sentences from the Great Appendix that you feel are particularly central to the theoretical point of the text. Be prepared to explain why in class.

Class 3: Buddhism

- RLCP, Introduction to Part II (69-74); RLCP, Fazang, "The Rafter Dialogue" (80-86)
 - This is a famous explication of "dependent origination" (see p. 83). How can it be that whether a thing is a "rafter" depends on whether there are roof tiles?
- RCLP, Fazang, "Essay on the Golden Lion" (86-91)
 - Explain these lines: "We discuss the lion in order to point out our ignorance. We discuss the Substance of the gold to make manifest its genuine nature" (90).
- RCLP, Huineng, "Platform Sutra" (91-98)
 - What differences can you discern between Shenxiu's poem and Huineng's (p. 93)?
 - What connections can you draw between Huineng's poems and his lamp-light analogy in §15?
- RCLP, Zongmi, "On Humanity," "The One Vehicle" section (104-106 only)
 - How does the idea that all sentient beings have a "fundamentally conscious true mind" compare to other Buddhist teaching we read for this class? Which is closest and which is most distant?

Class 4: Shared Discourse and Overview of What is to Come

- Li Ao, *Fu-Hsing Shu* (*Fuxing Shu*; "Letter on Returning to the Nature"). You may ignore all of translator Barrett's discussion if you like, reading only the small-font text, which begins on p. 94.
 - There is a contrast between "emotions" and "nature" throughout the essay. What is so bad about emotions?
 - The Tang dynasty was very pluralistic: Buddhists read and commented on "Confucian" texts, and vice-versa. Note the ways that Li Ao's text can often be read as related to more than one context (e.g., section 2.4, and Barrett's comment, on p. 100). So how do we know if he is a Confucian or Buddhist?
 - A few helpful hints on Barrett's old-fashioned romanization:

- *Chung-Yung* = Doctrine of the Mean
 - *I Ching* = *Yi Jing* = Book of Changes
 - *Li Chi* = Record of Rites
- Han Yu's diatribe against Buddhism and Daoism; "On the Way," RLCP, 126-30.
 - According to Han Yu, what is wrong with Daoism and Buddhism?
 - Insofar as you have a sense of what the classical Confucians taught, is there anything in Han Yu's essay that seems different or even inconsistent from Classical Confucianism?
- Overview of Neo-Confucian thinkers and their affiliations (no reading)

Class 5: Metaphysics: Vital Stuff (*Qi* 气)

- Reading:
 - Angle & Tiwald, *Neo-Confucianism: A Philosophical Introduction*; hereafter, "A&T"), Chapter 2
 - Read the whole chapter, though for this class we will focus on issues raised in section 2 and pp. 44-47
 - Zhou Dunyi, "Explanation of the Diagram of the Great Ultimate" (or, I prefer, "Supreme Pivot (*taiji* 太极)": RLCP #24
 - Zhang Zai, "Eastern Inscription"
- Questions:
 - Look at the diagram on p. 138 (or A&T 45). What is represented by the empty circle at the center of the second large circle from the top?
 - What is the relation between qi and "the Nature," especially for Zhang Zai?
 - How does Zhang's vision in the Eastern Inscription compare with that of Zhou Dunyi?

Class 6: Metaphysics: Pattern (*Li* 理)

- For review:
 - A&T, Chapter 2, Section 3 (on Pattern)
- Reading:
 - RLCP, #32, pp. 168-177 (Zhu Xi on Metaphysics, from his *Classified Conversations*)
 - RLCP, #51, pp. 318-325 (Dai Zhen on Li, from his *An Evidential Commentary on the Meaning of Terms in the Mengzi*)
- Questions:
 - We will discuss the "One and Many," "Contents of Pattern," and "Normativity and Value" issues in terms of both Zhu Xi's ideas (see the next reading, in addition to things cited in A&T) and Dai Zhen's critique.
 - Prepare one comment or question for each of these three issues (it is fine to discuss on Moodle in advance if you like).

Class 7: Metaphysics: Pattern and Vital Stuff

- For review:
 - A&T, Chapter 2, Section 4
- Reading:
 - Luo Qingshun, Knowledge Painfully Acquired, §§1-15 (pp. 49-67)
 - JeeLoo Liu, "Wang Fuzhi's Philosophy of Principle (Li) Inherent in Qi (selection)
- Questions:
 - Does Zhu Xi actually hold the "asymmetrical co-dependence" doctrine?
 - Is such a doctrine coherent and defensible?
 - How different is it from the positions on li-qi relations held by other philosophers, especially Luo Qingshun and Wang Fuzhi?

Class 8: Nature: Nature as Ground of Values

- Reading:
 - A&T, Chapter 3, "Nature"
 - Read Zhu Xi, "First Letter to the Gentlemen of Hunan"
 - NB that Zhu Xi = Chu Hsi
- Questions:
 - Read very carefully the passage quoted from Doctrine of the Mean on A&T3, p. 5. How does "nature" relate to the "not yet arisen" and then "arisen"? How, in turn, are those two ("not yet arisen" and "arisen") connected?
 - Are you convinced that nature, on Zhu's conception, can be both non-empirical ("above form") and yet direct us?
 - Why does Zhu Xi change his mind, as described in the First Letter?

Class 9: Nature: The Challenge of Badness / Beyond Good and Evil?

- In this class we will focus first on §4 of A&T, Chapter 3, and then turn to §3. Review both.
- Reading in conjunction with §4:
 - RCLP #26 (Cheng Hao's "Letter on Calming the Nature")
 - RCLP #27 (Cheng Hao, Selected Sayings), passages 1- 5 only (pp. 143-146). Note that Passage 4 is also partly translated and discussed on A&T3, pp. 16-17
 - RCLP #31 (Cheng Yi, Selected Sayings), passages 27-8 only (p. 163)
- Questions:
 - What is the problem with Cheng Yi's idea that we have two natures?
 - Does Cheng Hao solve the problem? (You might note that Luo Qingshun thinks he does; See Luo, Knowledge Painfully Acquired, §65.)
 - Does Zhu Xi solve the problem?
- Reading in conjunction with §3:
 - RLCP #38 (Wang Yangming's "Questions on the Great Learning")
- Question:
 - Wang Yangming is a major "heartmind-focused" Neo-Confucian, and this is our first encounter with him. How does his view of nature differ from those we have previously seen, as far as you can tell? In saying that, in some sense, nature is beyond good and bad, is he committing himself to nihilism (that there are no values)?

Class 10: Emotions and Heartmind: Overview

- Reading:
 - A&T Chapter 4
- Questions:
 - A key tension in Neo-Confucian discussions of emotion is the effort to avoid being led astray by emotions, on the one hand, while also recognizing the need for actual emotional motivation to do good, on the other.
 - Map out the philosophers discussed in the chapter on a spectrum: who is most worried about emotions (or desires, etc.)? Who is most willing to accept our emotions as they are? Is there a middle ground, and is it plausible?
 - We will spend quite a bit of time over the next couple weeks discussing the "seven" (emotions) and the "four" (beginnings).
 - Make sure you know what these mean and which reactions/feelings/emotions belong in which.
 - On p. 100 we introduce the "guidance problem" and the "motivation problem." What are these, and why are they problems?
 - Wang Yangming's idea of "good knowing (*liangzhi*)" is very famous.
 - Does it seem to you to solve the guidance and motivation problems?
 - The heartmind ends up being one of the key concepts in many Neo-Confucians' efforts to solve the guidance and motivation problems.
 - We will focus on Zhu Xi's version of the heartmind (and especially Fuji's model for understanding it; see pp. 83-84).

Class 11: Emotions: Four-Seven Debate I

- Reading:
 - Kalton et al, trans., *The Four-Seven Debate*, Introduction (pp. xv – xxxv) and Chapters 1 – 4 (pp. 1 – 47)
- Topics / Questions:
 - Introduction to Korea, Korean Neo-Confucianism, and the Four-Seven Debate
 - The debate is sparked by T'oegye's statement (on a diagram of Chong Chiun):
 - “The Four Beginnings are the issuance of principle (*li*); the Seven Feelings are the issuance of material force (*ch'i*)” (p. 1).
 - NB that *ch'i* = *qi* = vital stuff
 - T'oegye then revises this to read:
 - “The issuance of the Four Beginnings is purely a matter of principle and therefore involves nothing but good; the issuance of the Seven Feelings includes material force and therefore involves both good and evil” (p.)]
 - NB that “Seven Feelings” = “seven emotions.”
 - Finally, T'oegye locates a passage from Chu Hsi that is virtually the same as his original statement:
 - “The Four Beginnings, these are the issuance of principle; the Seven Feelings, these are the issuance of material force (四端是理之发，七情是气之发)” (p. 14).
 - NB that “principle” = “Pattern”

- What are the main disagreements?
- How can Kobong explain the Chu Hsi (i.e., Zhu Xi) quote?
- With whom do you agree? Can you see issues that neither one solves adequately?

Class 12: Emotions: Four-Seven Debate II

- Reading:
 - Kalton, Chapter 5 (pp. 49-79) and selections from Chapter 6 (pp. 84-7 and “On the Last Section” – pp. 93-5)
- Topics / Questions:
 - The authority of Chu Hsi (Zhu Xi)
 - T’oegye and Kobong variously appeal to Chu Hsi and explain/justify their differences from him. See pp. 15, 17-18, 21, 41-2, 76, and 93-5.
 - What are their respective views of Master’s Chu’s role in their debate? Are they consistent over time?
 - Do their respective positions match up with views you are familiar with from today?
 - One of Kobong’s core contentions is that the Four Beginnings are a subset of the Seven Feelings, which seems to imply that they can go wrong.
 - How do they debate this issue? Contrast Kobong on p. 46 with T’oegye on pp. 65, 72, and 77.
 - Which position seems the most convincing? Is it consistent with Mencius’s original statement?
 - Dueling metaphors
 - T’oegye introduces the horse-rider metaphor on pp. 65-7. What is he trying to show? Is it convincing?
 - Kobong relies a great deal on a moon-reflecting-in-water metaphor. What are its strengths and weaknesses? In particular, is there a difference between the role of “radiance” and “movement of waves” (p. 86)?

Class 13: Epistemology: Sensory Knowing vs. Virtuous-Nature’s Knowing

- Reading:
 - A&T Chapter 6, pp. 110-122
 - Kim, "Rethinking the Self’s Relation to the World in the Mid-Ming: Four Responses to Cheng-Zhu Learning"
- Questions:
 - A&T argue that "knowing" in early China tends to focus on "knowing-of" or "knowing-about" rather than "knowing-that." Do you see ways in which this basic orientation is also revealed in Neo-Confucian discussions of knowing?
 - Is "virtuous nature’s knowing" really a kind of "knowing," as you use the term? Whose account of it do you believe makes the most sense?
 - What is the perceived and actual relation between Zhu Xi's views of learning, and what came to be called "vulgar learning" in the Ming dynasty?
 - Which of the four approaches to knowing considered in Kim's article strikes as the most promising? Which is the most problematic?

Class 14: Epistemology: Zhu Xi's Three Levels; and the Debate over *Gewu*

- PART 1: Zhu Xi's Three Levels
- Reading:
 - A&T Chapter 6, pp. 122-126
- Question:
 - What makes level 2 knowing different from Levels 1 and 3, and why is it important?
- PART 2: The Debate Over *Gewu*
- For review:
 - "The Greater Learning"
 - A&T Chapter 7, pp.143-145, on "getting a handle on things (*gewu*)"
 - Luo, *Knowledge Painfully Acquired*, §§6, 7, and 10 (on *gewu*)
- Reading:
 - Wang Yangming, *Record for Practice* §7, in RLCP, p. 271.
 - Wang Yangming, "Letter to Gu Dongqiao" (Keep in mind that each section of the letter begins with Wang quoting Gu (= Ku)'s letter: "Your letter says...", and then in the second paragraph of each section, Wang's reply begins.)
 - Luo, *Knowledge Painfully Acquired*, pp. 175-88 ("Two Letters to Wang Yangming")
- Questions:
 - What is the role in the "investigation of things" of seeking within one's self? Why does it have any role at all? What is Wang Yangming's critique of Zhu Xi (= Chu Hsi)'s theory of "investigation of things"?
 - Wang Yangming thinks that the word *ge* (which we are translating for the moment as "investigate") should be understood as "rectify." What is Luo's critique of that, and why? (See esp. p. 177)

Class 15: Epistemology: Unity of Knowing and Acting

- Reading:
 - A&T Chapter 6, Section 5
 - Zhu Xi (= Chu Hsi), *Learning to Be a Sage*, trans. by Gardner, pp. 116-27 ("Discussion of Knowledge and Action")
 - Wang Yangming, *Record For Practice* (RLCP #43; pp. 261-271 only)
- Questions:
 - Explain the eye-leg analogy in Zhu Xi, passage 3.1. Once you have read Wang Yangming, explain how Zhu's and Wang's views of the relation between knowing and action differ from one another.
 - How are knowing and acting one, according to Wang Yangming?

Class 16: Cultivation: Lesser Learning and Greater Learning

- Reading:
 - A&T Chapter 7, pp. 133-143
 - Gardner, trans. *Learning to Be a Sage*, Chapters 1 (pp. 88-95) and 2 (pp. 96-115). NOTE that Chu Hsi = Zhu Xi.
- Questions:

- In these first two chapters of *Learning to Be a Sage* we see a distinction between two phases of learning, the "lesser" and the "greater." What is the difference between the two? Why is "lesser learning" necessary?
- *Go-wu* (*gewu* 格物), which A&T translate as "getting a handle on things" and others translate as "investigation of things," is translated by Gardner as "apprehension of the principle in things" (e.g., in 1.1). Which is the best translation?
- Consider the role of personal effort in the different kinds of learning that Zhu/Chu discusses in these two chapters. Is it important at every stage? Is our effort always directed toward the "negative" work of removing barriers, or does have positive, constructive goals as well?
- Are the kinds of learning that Zhu/Chu discusses here entirely alien to you? What relation, if any, do they have to the kinds of learning that you have experienced?

Class 17: Cultivation: Mental Discipline and Reverential Attention

- For Review:
 - Gardner, trans., *Learning to Be a Sage*, Chapters 1 & 2
 - "Letter to the Gentlemen from Hunan,"
 - NB that Chan translates *jing* 敬, which A&T render as "reverential attention," as "seriousness"
- Reading:
 - A&T Chapter 7, pp. 145-151
 - Gardner, trans., *Learning to Be a Sage*, Chapters 6 (pp. 163- 179) and 7 (pp. 180-196).
 - NB that Gardner translates *jing* 敬, which A&T render as "reverential attention," as "inner mental attentiveness"
- Questions:
 - A&T suggest that there is a puzzle about how reverential attention can be simultaneously outward- and inward-focused. Based on your own experience and on what you've read from Zhu Xi, do you agree? Is there a single mental state of reverential attention? To the extent that you think there is, when have you come closest to experiencing it?
 - How does reverential attention contrast with seeking tranquility? How does it compare to seeking to "subdue the self" ([3.12] in Gardner)?
 - Is it plausible that cultivating reverential attention could bring one to level-three knowing, as discussed previously in the class?

Class 18: Cultivation: Reading

- Reading:
 - Gardner, trans., *Learning to Be a Sage*., Chapters 4 and 5.
 - A&T Chapter 7, Section 6
- Questions:
 - Why and how does Zhu/Chu want students to read? List as many reasons and methods or techniques as you can, and rank them in terms of order, and then in terms of importance.

- How is what Zhu/Chu says about the need to make reading "personally meaningful" related to the tie he sees between knowledge and action? Does this mean that Zhu/Chu believes that we all might take something different away from reading a particular text?
- Have you ever read a text in the way that Zhu/Chu recommends? What comes closest?

Class 19: Cultivation: Women's Learning

- Reading:
 - A&T Chapter 8, Section 4
 - Song Ruozhao, Analects for Women (selections)
 - Empress Xu, Instructions for the Inner Quarters (selections) RLCP #45 (Cheng Yi, "Biographies of My Parents")
 - RLCP #46 (Zhu Xi, "The Way of the Family")
 - RLCP #47 (Luo Rufang, "Essay...")
 - RLCP #48 (Li Zhi, "A Letter...")
- The background to all of these writings is the pervasive restriction of women in mid- and late- imperial China--at least among the middle- and upper-classes--to an "inner" sphere, reserving the "outer" sphere of public activity for men.
 - How do the various readings endorse, justify, or challenge the existing gender divisions and gender-based roles?
 - Based on your understanding of Neo-Confucianism, what stance do you think Neo-Confucians should adopt, to be consistent with their own commitments?

Class 20: Cultivation: Wu Yubi's Pursuit of Sagehood

- Reading:
 - Kelleher, trans., The Journal of Wu Yubi, xx-xxxix and 3-73
- Questions:
 - Chose a specific instance of Wu reflecting on his practice of one of the Neo-Confucian techniques for self-cultivation. How does this shed light on the more abstract discussions of this technique that we have previously encountered?
 - Does Wu make (moral) progress over the course of his life? What is some evidence? Is this evidence that Neo-Confucian cultivation "works"?

Class 21: Anthropocentric Ecology

- Reading:
 - Zhang Zai, "The Western Inscription"
 - Tu Wei-ming, "The Continuity of Being: Chinese Visions of Nature"
- Questions:
 - Tu says that for Chinese thinkers, "the appropriate metaphor for understanding the universe was biology rather than physics" (p. 109). How do you see this in Zhang Zai? What is its significance? Is it in some sense a mistake?
 - Do you feel able to think of yourself as a "filial son [or] daughter of the universe"?
 - Tu echoes other commentators in calling the neo-Confucian vision "humanistic." (p. 113). How does this relate to concerns about "anthropocentrism"? Can an

adequate environmental ethics be “humanistic” or (in some sense) “anthropocentric”?

Class 22: Politics (I)

- Reading:
 - A&T Chapter 9
- Questions:
 - Based on the reading, how would you define "politics," the putative topic of this chapter?
 - Consider the different meanings of "faction" that were debated by Neo-Confucians. Why were factions generally seen as so problematic?
 - Which position do you find more persuasive, overall: character-centered governance or institution-centered governance?

Class 23: Politics (II)

- Reading:
 - Luo Qingshun, *Knowledge Painfully Acquired*, §§44-54
 - Huang Zongxi, *Waiting for the Dawn*, selections
- Questions:
 - What role do institutions play for Luo Qingshun? Is he in favor of reviving institutions of the past?
 - Does Huang Zongxi's view of (selfish) desires seem any different from what we have seen before?
 - What does Huang Zongxi mean by "Law (*fa* 法)"? Which is more fundamental to Huang, the person or the institution?

Class 24: Conclusion (1): Modern Confucianism and Politics

- Readings:
 - Lee Ming-huei, "Confucian Traditions in East Asia: Their Destinies and Prospects"
 - Jiang Qing, "The Way of the Humane Authority. The Way Ahead for China's Political Future: The Theoretical Basis for Confucian Constitutionalism and a Tricameral Parliament" (Chapter 1 of *A Confucian Constitutional Order*)
- Questions:
 - These readings are by two of the leading Confucian thinkers today, one pro-democratic and the other opposed to democracy. What are the strongest and weakest points for each of them?

Class 25: Conclusion (2): Continuing to Think with the Neo-Confucians

- Reading:
 - Michael Kalton, "Extending the Neo-Confucian Tradition"
- Questions:
 - Kalton sees a serious future for Neo-Confucianism; strikingly, not just its moral or even political thought, but — with appropriate developments — even its metaphysics. How persuasive is this? What questions or challenges would you have for Professor Kalton?