PHIL5190/7190 (Seminar on Comparative Philosophy: East and West)
Moral Realism, Anti-Realism, and Confucianism

Course Outline (Tentative)

Location: UCC 109; Time: Wednesday 10:30-1:15 pm

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Course overview

One of the central issues of meta-ethics is about the objectivity of moral properties, if there are such properties. When we make claims such as "this action is morally right or wrong" and "this person is morally good or bad," are we assuming that there are such moral properties as rightness/wrongness and goodness/badness? If so, are they mind-dependent (non-objective) or mind-independent (objective)? In this course, we will discuss some main positions developed in the contemporary debate between moral realists (naturalist, non-naturalist, and moral sensibility theorists) and anti-realists (non-cognitivists, error theorists, and non-objectivists). Then we will turn to Confucianism, to see how it bears on the issue of moral realism and anti-realism. The goal of this comparative study is primarily not to use the contemporary moral realist and anti-realist theories as cookie-cutter to interpret/categorize classical Confucian moral theories, but aims to see whether and how Confucianism can make important contributions to this contemporary debate between moral realists and anti-realists.

Learning outcomes

1.   Develop sensitivity to the common concerns of human existence especially from a comparative perspective between eastern and western of philosophy.

2.   Equip students with life-long learning capacities especially through understanding of the connections between academic pursuits and life experience.

3.   Relate the subject matters to human experience and/or modern life.

Learning activities

1.   Students are supposed to attend weekly class sessions regularly; absence without excusable reasons is not tolerated;

2.   Students are supposed to come to class prepared, with the assigned readings for the given class carefully read;

3.   Students are supposed to actively participate classroom discussions by raising questions and making comments regarding either the assigned readings or the instructor's lectures or fellow students' comments;

4.   Students are supposed to write three papers (each with a minimum of 3000 English words), with the first paper is on moral anti-realism, the second on moralism, and the third on Confucianism. For their due dates, please refer to the course schedule below. They must be accompanied by a signed VeriGuide form. Late papers turned in within a day of the due date is accepted with light discount (for example an A grade will be discounted as A-); late papers turned in within a week of the due date are accepted with a heavy discount (for example, an A grade will be discounted as B). After one week of the due date, no papers will be accepted;

5.   Students are supposed to do one (or two) class presentation(s), based on the papers written as required above.

Guidelines of Papers:
For each paper, choose a topic of you own interest from those discussed in class. Make sure that this is a topic about which you have something of your own to say; summarize the relevant discussions of the topic by the author(s) we read and discussed in class; explain what part(s) of this position you have most agreements and, more importantly, disagreements with; develop your own alternative position, or provide your own arguments, and explain how your position and/or arguments will be able to overcome the

problems with, or further support, the position you summarize; think what objections (possible or actual, including from those authors we discussed) there might be to your arguments; try to respond such objections. Your paper may have an introductory paragraph (announce what you are going to do in this paper) and a concluding paragraph (summarize the main arguments of your paper). You may also consider divide your paper into several sections.

In addition to the required readings, you may also consult secondary literatures. Whatever materials you are using, it is imperative to indicate very clearly from which sources these materials are (title of the book, or title of the article and the journal in which the article is published, publication year, and page number).

Assessment scheme

Task nature	Description	Weight
Class Preparation/participation	Preparation for and participation at class discussions	15%
Three Papers		25% each (75% total)
One Presentation		10%

Learning Resources (those in bold face are compulsory readings)

Benson, Mark. 2014. "*Xunzi's Reinterpretation of Ritual: A Hermeneutic Defense of the Confucian Way*." In T.C. Kline III and Justin Tiwald, eds., *Ritual and Religion in the Xunzi*. Albany: SUNY Press, 107-134.

Copp, David. 2004. "Yong Huang on Zhu Xi's Virtue Ethics and Naturalistic Moral Realism." Australasian Philosophical Review 8.3 (forthcoming).

Cokelet, Brad. 2024. "Normative Skepticism about Attributive Human Goodness: Comments on 'Agent-centered Moral Realism' by Yong Huang." Australasian Philosophical Review 8.3 (forthcoming).

Goldin, Paul R. 2000. *Rituals of the Way: The Philosophy of Xunzi*. Chicago: Open Court.

Hagen, Kurtis. 2000. "A Critical Review of Ivanhoe on Xunzi." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27: 361–373.

Hagen, Kurtis 2003. "Xunzi and the Nature of Confucian Ritual." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71: 371-403.

Hagen, Kurtis. 2007. *The Philosophy of Xunzi: A Reconstruction*. Chicago: Open Court.

Huang, Yong. 2019. "How to Derive Ought From Is: Zhu Xi's Moral Realism." Dao Companion to Zhu Xi's Philosophy. Springer.
_____. 2024a. "Agent-focused Moral Realism: Zhu Xi's Virtue Ethics Approach to Meta-Ethics." Australasian Philosophical Review 8.3 (forthcoming).
_____. 2024b. "Agent-focused Moral Realism Defended: Responses to My Critics." Australasian Philosophical Review 8.3 (forthcoming).
_____. 2025. "Two Defenses of Moral Expressivism: From Simon Blackburn's Quasi-Realism to Wang Yangming's Agent-Focused Realism." In Yong Huang, ed., Simon Blackburn Encountering Chinese Philosophy. London: Bloomsbury (forthcoming).
Ivanhoe, Philip. 1991. "A Happy Symmetry: Xunzi's Ethical Thought," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59: 309–322.

Ivanhoe, Philip J. 2000. "Human Nature and Moral Understanding in the *Xunzi*." In T.C. Kline, III, and Philip J. Ivanhoe, ed., *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 237-249.

Ivanhoe, P.J. 2011. "McDowell, Wang Yangming, and Mengzi's Contributions to Understanding Moral Perception." *Dao* 10: 273–290.

Joyce, Richard. 2016. "Moral Anti-Realism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/moral-anti-realism/>. (Also refer to the list of the references at the end of entry).

Kline III, T.C. 2004. "Moral Cultivation through Ritual Participation: Xunzi's Philosophy of Ritual." In Kevin Shilbrack, ed., *Thinking through Ritual*. New York: Routledge, pp. 188-175.

Kupperman, Joel J. 2000. "Xunzi: Morality as Psychological Constraint." In T.C. Kline, III, and Philip J. Ivanhoe, ed., *Virtue, Nature, and Moral Agency in the Xunzi*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 89-102

Lebkuecher, Gina. 2024. "Mengzian Sensitivity to Social Roles." *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 23.2: 191-222.

Lee, Janghee. 2004. *Xunzi and Early Chinese Naturalism: Xunzi's Concept of Xin and His Ethical Theory*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Liu, Jeeloo. 2007. "Confucian Moral Realism." *Asian Philosophy* 17: 167-184.

Liu, JeeLoo. 2011. "The Is–Ought Correlation in Neo-Confucian Qi-Realism How Normative Facts Exist in Natural States of Qi." *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 43.1: 60–77.

刘纪璐. 2017. "儒家价值实在论能否抵制 Sharon Street 的达尔文式挑战?"《思想与文化》2: 157-171.

Liu, Jeeloo. 2018. "Zhu Xi's Internal Moral Realism: Human Nature Is Principle." In Liu, *Neo-Confucianism: Metaphysics, Mind, and Morality*. Malsden, MA: Wiley Blacwell.

Liu, Jeeloo. 2019. "Zhu Xi's Normative Realism and Internal Moral Realism." *Dao Companion to Zhu Xi's Philosophy*.

刘纪璐. 2019. "荀子如何调解'其善者伪也'与道德实在性的冲突:荀子的道德理论是道德建构论还是道德实在论?"《人文杂志》4：22-34.

Liu, JeeLoo. 2024. "The Trouble with Agent-Focused Moral Realism: On Huang Yong's Construal of Zhu Xi's Moral Realism." Australasian Philosophical Review 8.3 (forthcoming).

Liu, Xiusheng. 2002. "Mencius, Hume, and the Sensibility Theory." *Philosophy East & West Volume* 52: 75-97.

Relador, Aldrin. 2024. "Not Normative Enough: A Dilemma for Zhu Xu's Moral Realism?" Australasian Philosophical Review 8.3 (forthcoming).

Rooney OP, James Dominic. 2024. "A Dilemma for Yong Huang's Neo-Confucian Moral Realism," Australasian Philosophical Review 8.3 (forthcoming).

Sayre-McCord, Geoff. 2017. "Moral Realism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/moral-realism/>. (Also refer to the list of the references at the end of entry).

Shafer-Landau, and Terence Cuneo, eds. 2007. *Foundations of Ethics: An Anthology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Sheng, E.E. 2024. "What Is It for a Realist Metaethical Theory To Be Agent-Focused?" *Australasian Philosophical Review* 8.3 (forthcoming).

Shun, Kwong-loi. 1991a. "Mencius and the Mind-dependence of Morality: An Analysis of Meng Tzu 6A:4-5. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 18: 169-193.

Shun, Kwong-loi. 1991b. "Mencius and the Mind-Inherence of Morality: Mencius' Rejection of Kao Tzu's Maxim in Meng Tzu 2A: 2. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 18: 371-386.

Walker, Matthew D. 2024. "Aristotelian Naturalism, Zhu Xi, and the Goodness of Human Nature." *Australasian Philosophical Review* 8.3 (forthcoming).

Wong, David 2006. *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralist Relativism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tentative Course schedule (Class on September 25 is cancelled; it will be made up on December 2nd)

Week	*Topics*	*Reading*
1 (September 4)	(1) Introduction of the Course (2) Introduction to the topic: Moral Realism, Anti-realism, and Confucianism (3) Anti-realism 1: Moral Non-Cognitivism	Ayer and Blackburn (other than those indicated, all readings below are from Shafer-Landau and Terence Cuneo 2007) (Supplemental: Allan Gibbard)
2 (September 11)	Anti-realism 2: Moral Error Theories	Mackie and Joyce
(September 18: holiday; September 25 to be made up)		
3 (October 2)	Anti-realism 3: Moral Non-Objectivism	Korsgaard and Firth (Supplemental: Harman and Milo)

4 (October 9)	Discussion Session 1: Moral Anti-Realism (Presenters:)	
5 (October 17)	Moral Realism 1: Naturalistic (The 1st paper due)	Boyd and Railton
6 (October 24)	Moral Realism 2: Non-Naturalistic	Hampton and Shafer-Laudau
7 (October 31)	Moral Realism 3: Response-dependent Theories	McDowell and Wiggins
8 (November 6)	Discussion Session 2: Moral Realism (Presenters:)	
9 (November 13)	Confucianism: Agent-Focused Moral Realism (The 2nd paper due)	Huang 2019; Huang 2024a
10 (November 20)	Confucianism 2: Criticism of Huang's Agent-Focused Moral Realism	Copp 2024, Cokelet 2024, Walker 2024, Liu 2024, Sheng 2024, Rooney 2024, Relador 204
11 (November 27)	Confucianism 3: Defense of Huang's Agent-Focused Moral Realism	Huang 2024b; Huang 2025
13 (December 2, Class make-up)	Discussion 3: Confucianism (Presenters:)	
(December 16)	The Third Paper due	

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Use of generative AI tools
(Teachers should include information relevant to the approach to be adopted in the course here. Elaboration of each approach could be found in the separate file.)

Approach 1 - All use of AI tools is prohibited in assignments and assessment tasks   or

Approach 2 - Use of some AI tools is allowed   or

Approach 3 - Use of AI tools is allowed with explicit acknowledgement and proper citation or

~~Approach 4   Use of some AI tools is allowed with no acknowledgement~~