

Today's Lecture

- Tenth in-class quiz
- Admin stuff
- Introductory remarks on Chinese Philosophy
- Confucianism

Admin stuff

- Remember: If you are choosing your own term paper topic, you should see me sooner rather than later. Don't leave yourself too little time to talk with me about your topic before the absolute deadline for doing so.
- Any questions about the term paper topics?
- I'll have your third assignments ready for pick up as soon as I can after 'Conference Week'.
- My office hours for next week are cancelled. You can still see me by appointment, or reach me in cyberspace.

Chinese Philosophy: Introductory remarks

- Just as the pursuit to understand and alleviate suffering is a common thread running through Indian philosophies, so the pursuit to establish (and maintain) harmony in ourselves and harmony or order in our dealings in the world is a common thread running through *most* Chinese philosophies (*Asian Philosophies*, p.265).

Chinese Philosophy: Introductory remarks

- The establishment of harmony in ourselves takes the form of self-cultivation...the cultivation of a virtuous or moral character.
- The foundations of a just society are, for many Chinese philosophers, found in the well-cultivated individual (*Asian Philosophies*, p.265).
- This emphasis on self-cultivation, and on contributing to a just society, incline many scholars of Chinese philosophy or culture to (somewhat unfairly) characterize Chinese philosophy as this-worldly, rather than other-worldly (*Asian Philosophies*, p.266).

Chinese Philosophy: Introductory remarks

- Historically, there has been a deeply held belief in Chinese societies that everything, and everyone, has a proper place and function. This belief informed the hierarchical societies characteristic of dynastic China. (This belief in order and universal function can be also found in Indian and so-called Western cultures.)
- The reverence accorded one's ancestors was a reflection of, and contributed to, such a stratification of society.
- Indeed, from the Zhou Dynasty onwards, one's claim to leadership, nobility and the Imperial throne was legitimated by finding significant, important or powerful ancestors in one's genealogy (See Creel's discussion of this in his book *Chinese Thought: From Confucius to Mao Tse-Tung*. 1953/75. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).

Chinese Philosophy: Introductory remarks

- The notion of *Tao* can be initially understood within the context of the pursuit of order and harmony.
- Specific instances of order or harmony are particular manifestations of *Tao*.
- Take care here. Confucius' use of this term, and he does use it, should not be confused with the meaning it acquires within Taoism (See Creel's discussion of this in his book *Chinese Thought: From Confucius to Mao Tse-Tung*. 1953/75. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp.32-39).

Chinese Philosophy: Introductory remarks

- Confucius typically means one of two things when using 'Tao': (1) The sum total of truths about humanity and the universe, or (2) the path adopted or prescribed by a particular figure, individual or society.
- There is arguably a third use, as in the phrase 'Way of Heaven', that points to the Deity of the Zhou Dynasty and the idea that the decree or will of Heaven explains the rise and fall of fortunes, be they the fortunes of the individual, a family line or even an Imperial Dynasty.

Chinese Philosophy: Introductory remarks

- For many Chinese philosophers and thinkers *Yin*, which is associated with darkness, passivity, and *femaleness*, and *Yang*, which is associated with brightness, activity, and *maleness*, together constitute **the fundamental principles** out which arise **the basic elements** of the physical universe (earth, water, fire, metal and wood (*Asian Philosophies*, p.261)) and, hence, **the essence of** objects and processes in Nature.
- These principles, and their interaction, are used, by many, to explain **changes** in Nature (*Asian Philosophies*, pp.261-62).

Chinese Philosophy: Introductory remarks

- The duality and unity of *Yin-Yang* has encouraged a *tendency* in Chinese thought to seek the reconciliation of opposites in harmonious wholes, as seen in the balance of *yin* and *yang* in creating each of those elements that constitute the physical universe (or the objects and processes contained therein).
- This is also seen in ‘the’ Chinese philosophical method of seeking reconciliation of views rather than adopting an exclusivity (*Asian Philosophies*, p.267). (This claim can, of course, be exaggerated.)

Confucianism: Confucius

- Confucius, which is the romanized form of K'ung Fu-Tzu or Kong Zi (or Master K'ung/Kong), was a sixth century B.C.E. Chinese philosopher.
- (As an aside, scholars oscillate between using 'Confucius', 'K'ung Fu-Tzu' and 'Kong Zi' to refer to the philosopher in question. You can use any of these names, *just be consistent.*)

Confucianism: Confucius

- A contemporary or near contemporary of Lao Tzu (*if there was such a historical figure*), Confucius formulated his position within a cultural context of *great political instability, war and civil unrest*.
- The place accorded order and harmony in both Confucianism and Taoism is thought by some scholars to reflect these features of their respective founder's environment (again, Lao Tzu may not have been a genuine historical figure) (See Koller's comments in your *Asian Philosophies*, pp.270-71, 287-88).

Confucianism: Confucius

- Confucius' philosophy is often characterized as *humanist* (don't confuse this with Secular Humanism).
- Fundamentally this characterization arises out of Confucius' insistence that the source of our values should be sought in ourselves (or in the full realization or expression of our humanity).
- More accurately, then, the source of our values should be sought in our nature, here understood as our full moral potential (as human beings).
- The values that we ought to acquire, the prescriptions which ought to inform our actions, are those which (i) aid in achieving this potential, or (ii) which are informed by its presence (*Asian Philosophies*, p.271).

Confucianism: Confucius

- It is important to recognize that Confucius' philosophy has two foci: ethics and politics (i.e. good governance).
- A fundamental theme underlying these foci is the cultivation of the morally Ideal person (*Asian Philosophies*, p.270).
- Even Confucius' discussion of how rulers or government administrators ought to conduct themselves is with a particular eye to encouraging the populace to live morally because of their example (*Asian Philosophies*, pp.276-77).

Confucianism: Confucius

- “The conviction that it is possible to transform oneself and all of society through the cultivation of virtue, and that this transformation is necessary if society and the individual are to flourish, is shared by all Confucians ...” (*Asian Philosophies*, p.270).
- Though Confucius was not a Confucian (anymore than Christ was a Christian or Buddha was a Buddhist), this nicely encapsulates the view Confucius espoused.

Confucianism: Confucius

- There are two important principles underlying Confucius' ethical outlook:
- (1) We ought to cultivate our full humanity, and
- (2) We should order our actions such that we not do to others what we would not have done to ourselves (you can also substitute this proscription for the prescription 'do to others what you would have done to you').
- (1) emphasizes the inner, and (2) emphasizes the outer, life of the individual (and the *reciprocity* necessary to living the good life in society) (*Asian Philosophies*, p.272-73).