

# PHIL 1502 – Asian Philosophies

Dr. Trevor Pearce — [tpearce6@charlotte.edu](mailto:tpearce6@charlotte.edu)

Fall 2024 — MW 10:10–11:00am (with Friday breakouts) — McEniry 125

## Office Hours

By appointment in Winningham 103C (or on Zoom) or with teaching assistants.

## Teaching Assistants

Rawlanda Hinds ([rhinds2@charlotte.edu](mailto:rhinds2@charlotte.edu))

Rachel Rickborn ([rrickbor@charlotte.edu](mailto:rrickbor@charlotte.edu))

Ethan Talbot ([etalbott@charlotte.edu](mailto:etalbott@charlotte.edu))

## Description

This course will introduce students to a variety of Asian philosophies, concentrating on ancient texts and traditions. The first three quarters of the class will cover Chinese philosophy during the Warring States period (475–221 BCE), specifically Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism, and their interrelations. The last quarter of the class will cover a separate tradition within Indian philosophy: Buddhism, which emerged during this same time period and famously argued that the self does not exist.

## Course Objectives

1. Be able to identify the central claims and arguments of four major Asian philosophical traditions: Confucianism, Mohism, Daoism, and Buddhism.
2. Understand how the perspectives defended by these Asian philosophical traditions are similar to or different from perspectives in those philosophical or cultural traditions with which they are more familiar.
3. Provide examples of how the claims defended in one or more of these Asian philosophical traditions can help address present-day philosophical or social problems.

## Required Texts

Kurtis Hagen and Steve Coutinho (eds.). *Philosophers of the Warring States: A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy*. Broadview, 2018. **PWS**

Mark Siderits. *The Buddha's Teachings as Philosophy*. Hackett, 2022. **BTP**

## Evaluation of Students

20% Question / Passage / Pattern — Mondays & Wednesdays

20% Breakout Attendance — Fridays

20% Midterm Exam — September 30

20% “Unessay” — November 22

20% Final Exam — December 11

Question / Passage / Pattern: You must read all of the assigned reading by the day it is due. Each day, in the first five minutes of class, you will have a brief handwritten assignment in which you must discuss a question, a passage, or a pattern. Take out a piece of paper. At the top of the page, write ‘question,’ ‘passage,’ or ‘pattern.’ Then, depending on which you have picked, follow these instructions:

**Question** Pose a question related to the reading. It should be a genuine question, i.e., one you really want to know the answer to. Then attempt to answer the question.

**Passage** Reproduce a specific passage that resonated with you and give a short explanation why.

**Pattern** Identify a pattern, either within the reading or one between this reading and an earlier one, along with a short explanation of what that pattern implies about the reading (or about the larger concept, if you are connecting it to earlier readings).

You may use books and notes when doing these assignments and you must include the relevant page or section numbers from the reading. They will be collected each Monday and Wednesday and graded pass/fail by the teaching assistants. You must write down both your name and your section number before handing in your assignment. Neither late assignments nor assignments submitted via email will be accepted. Absence from class is not a valid excuse for not turning in your Question / Passage / Pattern (QPP) assignment.

The teaching assistants will also take attendance at each of the Friday breakout sessions. Collectively, the QPP assignments and breakout attendance make up 40% of your grade. Your lowest two QPP assignment grades are automatically dropped; one missed breakout session is automatically excused. Request for any additional excused absences from either

lectures or breakout sessions due to illness, medical emergencies, personal or family emergencies, military orders, or court orders should be made to your teaching assistant—the leader of your Friday breakout section—rather than to the primary instructor. You can also submit an absence verification request at [Student Assistance and Support Services](#).

The midterm exam will be in class on Monday, September 30 and will cover Confucianism and Mohism. It will likely consist of a mix of short-answer and long-answer questions. The official final exam time slot is Wednesday, December 11 from 8:00–10:30am, though the actual exam time may be shorter. This exam will cover Daoism and Buddhism and will also likely consist of a mix of short-answer and long-answer questions. You may use books and notes for these exams but you may not use the internet. Both exams will be handwritten.

The “unessay” in this class is just like a traditional “unessay” but smaller. For your final project, instead of writing a typical philosophy paper—a careful argument in defense of a particular claim—you will create something that (a) can be consumed in a very brief period of time and (b) can be easily shared with other people, either in your Friday breakout section or online. This can be anything from a 30-second video to a meme to a piece of art. The only additional constraint is that whatever you create should do at least one of the following:

1. Illustrate a major claim of one of the four traditions we have studied in this class.
2. Compare the perspective of one of the four traditions with some other philosophical or cultural tradition with which you are familiar.
3. Relate a particular perspective or claim found in one of the four traditions to a concrete philosophical, social, or ethical problem.

You will submit this assignment through Canvas along with a 200-word commentary by 2:00pm on November 21, as well as presenting it lightning style—i.e., in one minute—at your Friday breakout session on Friday, November 22. It will be graded pass/fail.

## **Class Policies**

The standards and requirements set forth in this syllabus may be modified at any time by the course instructor. Notice of such changes will be by Canvas announcement or email.

I will conduct this class in an atmosphere of mutual respect. I encourage your active participation in class discussions. Each of us may have strongly differing opinions on the various topics of class discussions. The conflict of ideas is encouraged and welcome. The orderly questioning of the ideas of others, including mine, is similarly welcome. However, I will exercise my responsibility to manage the discussions so that ideas and argument

can proceed in an orderly fashion. You should expect that if your conduct during class discussions seriously disrupts the atmosphere of mutual respect I expect in this class, you will not be permitted to participate further.

All students and the instructor are expected to engage with each other respectfully. Unwelcome conduct directed toward another person based upon that person's actual or perceived race; color; religion (belief and non-belief); sex; sexual orientation; gender identity; age; national origin; physical or mental disability; veteran status; genetic information; or for any other reason, may constitute a violation of [University Policy 501](#). Any student suspected of engaging in such conduct will be referred to the [Office of Civil Rights and Title IX](#).

UNC Charlotte is committed to providing a respectful, safe, and inclusive environment for community members that is free from discrimination, discriminatory harassment, and interpersonal violence. Please be aware that all UNC Charlotte employees, including faculty members, are expected to relay any information or reports of discrimination, discriminatory harassment, or sexual and interpersonal misconduct they receive. This means that if you tell me or the teaching assistants about a situation involving these matters, we must report the information to the [Office of Civil Rights and Title IX](#). If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, there are several on-campus resources that are not subject to this mandatory reporting requirement, e.g., the [Center for Counseling and Psychological Services](#).

This course affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If you prefer to be called a different name than what is indicated on the class roster, please let me know. Feel free to correct me on your preferred gender pronoun. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If a religious accommodation is needed, students are expected to communicate directly with me regarding the related need. The request should be made in writing and should state (i) the specific accommodation being requested, (ii) the religious practice or belief the student holds, (iii) how the requested accommodation enables the student to participate in their religious practice or belief, and (iv) the date(s) and/or frequency of the requested accommodation. The request should be submitted as far in advance as possible. [University Policy 409](#) provides more details about this procedure.

Students in this course seeking accommodations to disabilities must first consult with the [Office of Disability Services](#) and follow the instructions of that office for obtaining accommodations.

Finally, all students are required to read and abide by the [Code of Student Academic Integrity](#). Violations of the Code, including plagiarism, will result in disciplinary action as provided in the Code. Definitions and examples of plagiarism are set forth in the Code and on the [Student Accountability & Conflict Resolution](#) website.

## Class Schedule

### Confucianism & Mohism

**Aug 19** Introduction — no reading

**Aug 21** Confucius on Ritual Propriety — PWS 75–82

- “Ritual Propriety (*li*)”
- “Ritual Propriety, Music, and Harmony”
- “Ritual Propriety and Realizing *ren* (humanity)”

**Aug 23** Breakout Discussions

**Aug 26** Confucius on Ethics — PWS 82–92

- “Doing One’s Utmost with Empathetic Consideration”
- “From aspirants (*shi*) to exemplary persons (*junzi*)”
- “Virtuous Character and Ethical Sensibility”

**Aug 28** Confucius on Politics — PWS 92–104

- “Virtuous Rulership”
- “Roles, Responsibilities, and Names”
- “When *dao* Does Not Prevail”

**Aug 30** Breakout Discussions

**Sep 4** Mo Zi on Social Structure — PWS 250–260

- “Excerpt from Book 9, Chapter 37”
- “‘Conforming with Superiors’ (Book 3, Chapter 11)”
- “‘The Intentions of *Tian*’ (Book 7, Chapter 26)”
- “Excerpt from End of Book 7, Chapter 27”
- “‘Promoting the Worthy’ (Book 2, Chapter 8)”

- “Excerpt from Book 2, Chapter 9”
- Sep 6** Breakout Discussions
- Sep 9** Mo Zi on Impartial Concern — PWS 260–266
- “‘Impartial Concern’ (Book 4, Chapter 16)”
- Sep 11** Mo Zi on Ruism — PWS 266–274
- “‘Against Aggression’ (Book 5, Chapter 17)”
  - “‘Against *Ming* (Fatalism)’ (Book 9, Chapter 35)”
  - “‘Against the Ruists’ (Book 9, Chapter 39)”
  - “‘Moderation in Expenditures’ (Book 6, Chapter 20)”
  - “‘Against Musical Delights’ (Book 8, Chapter 32)”
- Sep 13** Breakout Discussions
- Sep 16** Meng Zi on Human Nature — PWS 114–125
- “The Sprouts of Virtue”
  - “Is *yi* Internal or External?”
- Sep 18** Xun Zi on Human Nature — PWS 218–231
- “Natural Dispositions are Detestable” [Chapter 23]
  - “From Chapter 9, *Wang Zhi* (‘Kingly Regulations’)”
- Sep 20** Breakout Discussions
- Sep 23** Meng Zi on Ethics — PWS 125–136
- “Preserving and Nourishing One’s Heart”
  - “What to Do?”
  - “Critique of Yang Zi and Mo Zi”
  - “Critique of ‘Respectable Villagers’”

**Sep 25** Meng Zi on Politics — PWS 136–152

- “Dialogues with King Hui of Liang”
- “Dialogues with King Xuan of Qi”
- “Dialogues with Duke Wen of Teng”
- “Force and Moral Authority”

**Sep 27** Breakout Discussions

**Sep 30** MIDTERM EXAM (during regular lecture time)

## Daoism

**Oct 2** Lao Zi on Reflection — PWS 291–295 [plus extra PDF]

- PDF of alternative translations for Chapter 1 and Chapter 38
- “Phenomenology, Meditation, and Spiritual Cultivation”

**Oct 4** Breakout Discussions

**Oct 7** Lao Zi on the Dao — PWS 295–313

- “*Tian Dao*: The Way of the Cosmos”
- “*Ren Dao*: The Way of Humans”

**Oct 9** Lao Zi on Politics — PWS 314–328

- “*Wu Wei*: Politics, Utopianism, and Empire”

**Oct 11** Breakout Discussions

**Oct 14** NO CLASS (Student Recess)

**Oct 16** Zhuang Zi on Wandering Beyond — PWS 332–342

- “From Chapter 1, *Xiao Yao You*, ‘Wandering Beyond’”

**Oct 18** Breakout Discussions

**Oct 21** Zhuang Zi on Knowledge — PWS 377–396

- “From Chapter 2, *Qi Wu Lun*, ‘Discussions on Smoothing Things Out’”

**Oct 23** Zhuang Zi on Skill — PWS 369–377

- “From Chapter 3, *Yang Sheng Zhu*, ‘The Principle of Nurturing Life’”
- “From Chapter 19, *Da Sheng*”
- “From Chapter 13, *Tian Dao*, ‘The *Dao* of the Cosmos’”
- “From Chapter 5, ‘The Questions of Tang’” [*Lie Zi*]

**Oct 25** Breakout Discussions

**Oct 28** Zhuang Zi on Natural Potency and Tranquility — PWS 360–365 & 351–359

- “From Chapter 4, ‘In the Human Realm’”
- “From Chapter 5, ‘Signs of the Flourishing of Potency’”
- “From Chapter 6, *Da Zong Shi*, ‘The Vast Ancestral Teacher’”

## Buddhism

**Oct 30** The Buddha — BTP 24–35

1.1 Who Was the Buddha?

1.2 First Teachings

**Nov 1** Breakout Discussions

**Nov 4** Suffering — BTP 35–50

1.3 The Cause and Cure of Suffering

1.4 Living without Suffering

**Nov 6** Self — BTP 51–60

2.1 Self As Essence

2.2 The Five *Skandhas*

**Nov 8** Breakout Discussions



- Nov 11** NO CLASS (Veterans Day)
- Nov 13** Non-Self — BTP 60–79
- 2.3 Arguing for Non-Self from Impermanence
  - 2.4 The Controller Argument
- Nov 15** Breakout Discussions
- Nov 18** Persons I — BTP 79–90
- 2.5 “Person” As Convenient Designator
  - Bonus Reading: PDF of Vajirā Sutta etc.
  - 2.6 Two Kinds of Truth
- Nov 20** Persons II — BTP 90–106
- 2.7 Persons as Conventionally Real
  - 2.8 Non-Self and Rebirth
- Nov 22** UNESSAY PRESENTATIONS (during regular breakout time)
- Nov 25** Nirvana — BTP 107–121
- 3.1 Can Nirvāna Be Described?
  - 3.2 Is Nirvāna What the Punctualist Says It Is?
  - 3.3 What Nirvāna Might Be Like
- Dec 2** Morality & Free Will — BTP 121–136
- 3.4 Grounding Moral Obligation
  - 3.5 Does a Causal Series of Sets of *Skandhas* Have Free Will?
- Dec 4** REVIEW SESSION (during regular lecture time)
- Dec 11** FINAL EXAM