

Tradition and Change in Early Confucianism

Phil 210, Fall 2022

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Overview of Today

- The Context of Classical Confucianism
- Kongzi and the *Analects* on Tradition, Moral Growth, and Filial Piety
- *Mengzi* 1A and 1B: Profit, Benevolence, and the Psychological Basis of Therapy

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Classical Confucianism – Social Context

- Early Zhou (c. 1000 BCE)
- Gradual changes
 - Decline of central power
 - Growth of population and social complexity
 - Feudal “lords” aspire to be kings



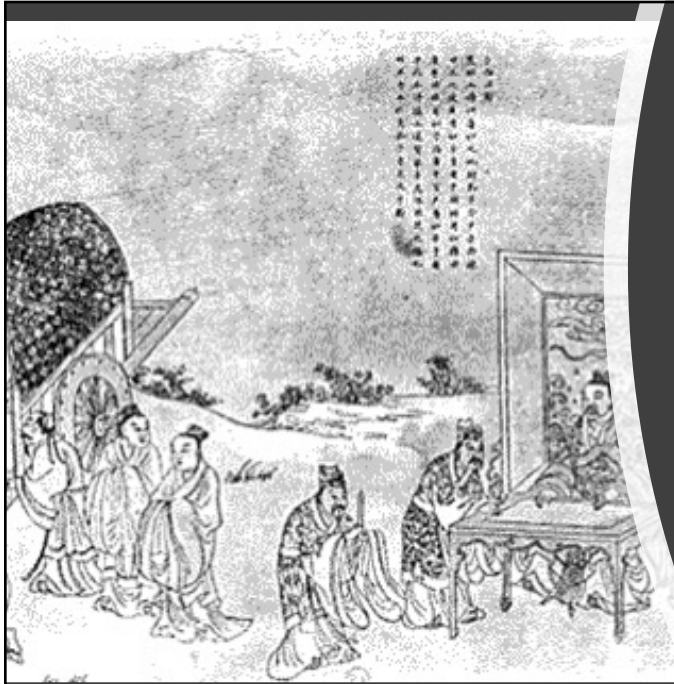
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Classical Confucianism – Social Context

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- Warring States Era (5th-3rd c. BCE)



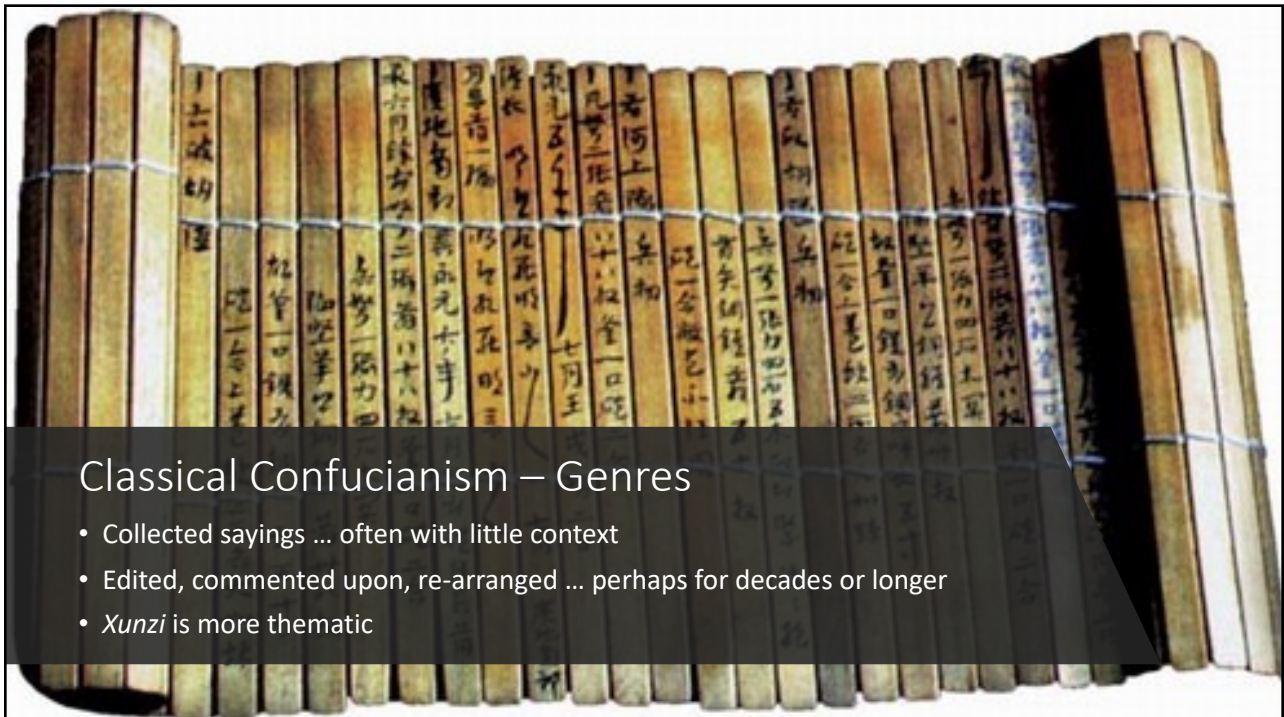
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Classical Confucianism

- Kongzi 孔子 (or Confucius), 551 – 479 BCE, pronounced kong-dz
- Mengzi 孟子 (or Mencius), 4th c. BCE, pronounced mung-dz
- Xunzi 荀子, 3rd c. BCE, pronounced hsün-dz
- The Way (*dao* 道) seems lost:
 - Learn from past
 - Theorize/articulate the Way
 - Teach the theory and practice

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Classical Confucianism – Genres

- Collected sayings ... often with little context
- Edited, commented upon, re-arranged ... perhaps for decades or longer
- *Xunzi* is more thematic

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Kongzi /Analects: Tradition and Change

- 2:11 One who reanimates [lit. warms up] the old in order to understand the new — such a person can be called a teacher.
- 7:1 The Master said, I transmit rather than invent. I trust in and love the ancient ways. I might thus humbly compare myself to Old Peng.
- 9:3 The Master said, A ceremonial cap made of linen is prescribed by the rituals, but these days people use silk. This is frugal and I follow the majority. To bow before ascending the stairs is what is prescribed by the rituals, but these days people bow after ascending. This is arrogant and — though it goes against the majority — I continue to bow before ascending.
- 15:36 The Master said, When it comes to benevolence, defer to no one, not even one's teacher.

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Kongzi /Analects: Growing Over One's Lifespan

- 2:4 The Master said, 'At fifteen I set my heart on learning; at thirty I took my stand; at forty I came to be free from doubts; at fifty I understood the Decree of Heaven; at sixty my ear was attuned; at seventy I followed my heart's desire without overstepping the line.'
- See "[How To Age Gracefully](#)" on YouTube

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Kongzi /Analects: Filial Piety (Xiao 孝)

- 2:5. Meng Yizi asked about filiality. The Master said, Never disobey.
- [...Later,] Fan Chi said, What does that mean? The Master said, When they are alive, serve them with propriety; when they are dead, inter them with propriety, and sacrifice to them with propriety.
- 2:7. Zi You asked about filiality. The Master said, The filiality of the present day: it is merely what one might call being able to provide nourishment. But if we consider the dogs and horses, they all get their nourishment. If there is no respect, where is the difference?
- 4.18 The Master said, In serving your parents you may gently remonstrate with them. However, once it becomes apparent that they have not taken your criticism to heart you should be respectful and not oppose them, and follow their lead diligently without resentment.

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Kongzi /Analects: Filial Piety (Xiao 孝)

- 1.2 Master You said, ...The exemplary person (*junzi* 君子) applies himself to the roots. "Once the roots are firmly established, the Way will grow." Might we not say that filial piety and respect for elders constitute the root of benevolence (*ren* 仁)?
- So, filial piety is:
 - A starting point for growth
 - A microcosm of fuller virtue
 - Of significance throughout one's life
- Still, this is not absolute obedience

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Mengzi and the *Mengzi*

- Born perhaps a century after Kongzi's death; the trends to which Kongzi was reacting have accelerated.
- Speaking to "Kings" and various students, advises on personal cultivation and on socio-political organization
- Emphasizes the need to cultivate and grow our natural starting points in order to attain greater individual virtue and societal harmony



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Mengzi 1A:1 – Core Ideas

- Mengzi and King Hui of Liang
- "...so you must have a way of profiting my state."
 - *Li* 利 = profit, benefit
- "Why must Your Majesty speak of 'profit'? Let there simply be benevolence and righteousness."
 - *Ren* 仁 = benevolence
 - *Yi* 義/义 – righteousness, appropriateness



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Mengzi 1A:1 – What’s the Argument?

What do you think the conclusion is?

1. Why must one speak of profit?
2. When people put profit before righteousness, they cannot be satisfied.
3. Let your majesty speak only of benevolence and righteousness.
4. Benevolent and righteous leaders are best.
5. We should strive to be virtuous.

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Mengzi 1A:1 – What’s the Argument?

For the conclusion “Let your majesty speak only of benevolence and righteousness,” what premises do we need?

1. People seeking profit will always want more.
2. People being benevolent and righteous will be satisfied.
3. The ruler’s example will influence the people.
4. Endless grasping leads to chaos.
5. Satisfaction leads to order.
6. Order is better than chaos.

Which of these premises is explicit in the passage? Which is implicit (so we need to infer it)?

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Mengzi 1A:7 — Explication

- “What must one’s Virtue be like so that one can become King?”
 - *De* 德 = virtue
- “One cares for the people and becomes King. This is something no one can stop.”
- “Can one such as ourselves care for the people?”
- “This heart is sufficient to become King.”
 - *Xin* 心 = heart, heartmind



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Mengzi 1A:7 & 1B:5 — Basic Reactions

- What reactions (feelings, emotions) are key to 1A:7?
 - Care for people
 - Inability to bear suffering of ox
 - Treat elders as elders ...
- What reactions are key to 1B:5?
 - Fond of wealth
 - Fond of sex
- NEXT TIME: Mengzi’s psychology of human nature, and its connection to virtue and the good life



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