

CHINESE PHILOSOPHY – Ancient Period

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Confucius

Author (The Gentleman Thinker as Founder of Culture) Chinese philosopher, teacher of ethics) Chinese name Kong Zi or K'ung Fu-tse. 551-479 bc, Chinese philosopher and teacher of ethics (see Confucianism). His doctrines were compiled after his death under the title *The Analects of Confucius*. Discuss the political and historical highlights Confucius' life and times.

Work (*Analects*) The *Lunyu* (*Analects*), is the most revered sacred scripture in the Confucian tradition. The collection of writings was probably assembled by the followers of Confucius and Confucianism. Based primarily on the Master's sayings which were set out in both oral and written form, the collection (*The Analects*) captures the essence of the Confucian spirit.

Discussion Questions

Comparative Literature:Law (Hebrew Scriptures)

Hebrew Scriptures and the writings of Confucius are similar in that they concern the law. However, they take fundamentally different approaches to the ethical life. Moses and the Code of Hammurabi are very tightly organized. In contrast, Confucius goes about it in a different way. How?

Comparative Literature:Ethics (Lao Tzu - Tao Te Ching)

Confucius and Daoists take uniquely different paths to ethics. Confucius is prescriptive and clear. Lao Tzu's approach is one of passivity. Describe them.

Comparative Literature: Cosmic order and justice (Bhagavad Gita)

The Bhagavad Gita focuses on dharma (duty) as the central focal point of the individual's responsibility in life. In contrast, Confucius looks at the dao. How are they similar? Different?

Comparative Literature: Concept of the Deity (Hebrew Scriptures - Book of Job)

In the Book of Job, God speaks directly to Job. He and Job have conversations, and Job complains about his sufferings. In contrast, in Confucius, deities are more abstract. Filial piety is what informs the individual's behavior, rather than a direct conversation with God.

Idea : Gentleman

What characterizes "the gentleman," according to Confucius? How, for instance, does a gentleman look upon his own endeavors? In what light does he understand his relationship to others both above and below him? How does he regard his parents?

Laozi (Lao Tzu)

Author Lao Tzu, which means "Old Master", was a philosopher of ancient China and is a central figure in Taoism (also spelled "Daoism").

Work (*Dao De Jing*) Wu wei, which means "non-action" or "not acting", is a tenet of the Tao Te Ching. The concept of wu wei is very complex and reflected in the words' multiple meanings, even in English translation; it can mean "not doing anything", "not forcing", "not acting" in the theatrical sense, "creating nothingness", "acting spontaneously", and "flowing with the moment."

Discussion Questions

Comparative Literature:Ethics (Bhagavad-Gita)

Dharma forms the underpinning of the Bhagavad-Gita. Dharma refers to duty, which involves disciplining both mind and body, and aspiring to "right thought" and "right deed." In contrast, Daoism promotes the idea of "letting go" – a passive approach that seems antithetical to the dharma approach. Compare and contrast them.

Comparative Literature Good Life (Hebrew Scriptures - *Book of Job*)

The Book of Job problematizes the notion of justice and righteousness vis a vis misfortune and suffering. In a nutshell, it asks, Why do bad things happen to good people? In contrast, one would never ask that question if one is following the dao. Why? Explain the differences between the views of life.

Comparative Literature:Righteous Life (St Augustine - *City of God* and *Confessions*)

Existence, according to St. Augustine, is very different than that found in Daoism. St. Augustine is concerned with the "fallenness" of the human – the fact that all are born sinners (rather than born pure), due to original sin. What is man's relation to sin in Daoism?

Theme: Religion (Daoism)

What are the main teachings of Lao Tzu? Describe his idea of "Letting Go of Self." What does the term "Tao Te Ching" mean? Why can the Tao not be spoken of? How can one "express the inexpressible"? Is action possible, given the notion of passivity?

Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu)

Author Chinese Taoist philosopher who advocated a skeptical approach to knowledge and a willing acceptance of change as a means of unifying oneself with the Tao. As you read, consider the following questions: Who was Chuang Tzu? Discuss the values that his work embodies. Describe the nature of his questions / questioning.

Works (Basic Writings) Chuang Tzu (399 - 295 B.C.) was an influential Chinese philosopher. His work consists of parables and conversations that reflect a Daoist view of the world. Chuang Tzu used Lao Tzu as a point of departure, and elaborated the writings and philosophy. Chuang Tzu focuses on nature, the role of the individual, and the order of the cosmos.

Discussion Questions

Comparative Literature: Ethical Life (Confucius - *Analects*)

Confucius and Chuang Tzu have seemingly opposite approaches to life and ethical behavior. Confucius stresses action. Zhuangzi stresses inaction. What do the two approaches reveal to you?

Comparative Literature: Ethics (Hebrew Scriptures. *Book of Job*)

One of the central paradoxes of the *Book of Job* is the fact that a good man is seemingly punished for no good reason. After all, in the Hebrew Bible, punishment follows disobedience. Yet, Job was a good man. In Zhuangzi, there is a different calculus at work. What does Zhuangzi say about the pattern of the dao and how it relates to the things that happen to men and women?

Comparative Literature: Good Life (Machiavelli - *The Prince*)

There are different ways to teach about ethics and ethical behavior. Each author uses a different approach.