

Abstracts for NECCT 2025

Title: Toward a Mengzian Theory of Justice: A Critical Reflection on Joseph Chan

Presenter: Ryan Powers

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Abstract: Although many authors have argued that Confucianism and democracy are compatible—indeed, mutually beneficial—the topic of a Confucian theory of distributive justice has received less attention.[1] That said, one notable attempt at outlining such a theory is found in Joseph Chan (2014) wherein he articulates a “Mencian” theory of justice.

Chan’s Mengzian theory of justice is a sufficientarian one. Sufficientarian views of justice argue that the primary concern of distributive justice is whether people have enough resources to live a good life. As such, sufficientarian views do not place moral weight on equal distributions—unlike egalitarian views—nor on whether the distributions are the results of just processes, unlike libertarian views. In this paper, I argue that Chan’s sufficientarian thesis should be modified. Specifically, I argue that a properly Mengzian view of sufficiency incorporates what G.A. Cohen calls a “principle of community.”[2] In short, I show that Mengzi’s concept of sufficiency requires an egalitarian concept of community, and vice versa, making his concepts of community and sufficiency interdependent. This interdependence thereby pushes Chan’s sufficientarianism in a more egalitarian direction than he admits.

To make this argument, my paper has three parts. In part 1, I explain how Chan’s Mengzian theory of justice fits within his wider project of developing a democratic version of Confucian political philosophy. In part 2, I show that, for Mengzi, the concept of sufficiency is interdependent with the concept of community. Finally, in part 3, I argue that this interdependence, contra Chan, entails certain egalitarian conclusions for a Confucian democracy, namely, that certain resource inequalities are not permissible because they threaten the conditions of community which Mengzi thinks makes sufficiency possible in the first place.

Title: The Huainanzi on Popular Elections

Presenter: Stephen Walker

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Abstract: While the de facto power of ordinary people to select their sovereigns fascinates classical Chinese thinkers, these thinkers never entertain the possibility that people might be granted de jure power in this area. Even when they do write about direct popular selection, the mechanism they envision is simply overwhelming acclaim rather than rule-bound procedures like voting. This presentation will examine relevant material in the Huainanzi, a text that is exceptionally sensitive to the importance of popular opinion in determining who can rule. I will

argue that the Huainanzi's silence on the possibility that people might legally select their leaders follows in part from its theories about the nature and purpose of legal institutions—and that, from these writers' point of view, the primary function of popular elections is not to select leaders in the first place.

In company with so-called “Legalists”, the Huainan writers think of law as a contingent invention by the powerful for managing subordinates. Any regime that initiates an electoral process does so for the sake of strengthening and preserving itself, primarily by delegitimizing violence as a mechanism of selection. Ordinary people will agree to keep violence off the table so long as they're persuaded that the results of elections fairly represent their interests. Meanwhile ambitious, exceptional, and/or well-positioned individuals are the ones who wind up filling leadership positions no less in democracies than in monarchies: governing is an inherently elite activity, different elites simply consenting to different protocols for managing their membership. To the extent that elections reduce political violence and resentment, the Huainan writers would say that they're as justified as any comparably functional invention; they would insist, however, that these elections are functional precisely because they don't decide how their societies are allocating power at a fundamental level.

Title: Constructing Confucius' Theory of Pedagogical Virtues from the Dialogues of Confucius Kongzijiayu 孔子家语

Title: Unity of Heaven and Humanity—A Daoist Vision from Laozi, Zhuangzi to the Lao-Yang Genesis Cosmology

Presenter: Charles Yang

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Abstract: “Unity of Heaven and Humanity” (Tian Ren He Yi) is one of the most holistic and ultimate concepts in Chinese philosophy. Over time, this notion has undergone varied interpretations across schools of thought. This paper firmly maintains that the original meaning of Tian Ren He Yi must be reclaimed through the foundational teachings of Laozi and Zhuangzi, while decisively excluding the moral-political overlays imposed by Confucianism. By returning to the Daoist cosmological root, we can reestablish the ontological, existential, ecological, and spiritual link between human beings and the cosmos. Furthermore, the paper integrates the Lao-Yang Genesis Cosmology, which extends Daoist philosophy into a modern scientific framework of cosmic evolution. Thus, Unity of Heaven and Humanity is not merely a moral ideal, but a profound cosmic vision that bridges ancient wisdom with contemporary crises—offering a path of harmony, freedom, and renewed civilization in the face of ecological collapse, spiritual dislocation, and civilizational disorder.

Title: Ganying and Early Chinese Perceptual Cosmology: Nature and Causation in the Philosophy of the Yijing

Presenter: Wang Huaiyu

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Abstract: My study retrieves the original meanings and central importance of perception (ganying 感應) for early Chinese experiences of Nature and Causation. Drawing upon the yinyang symbolism in the Yijing, I demonstrate the essential meaning of early Chinese understanding of Nature and causation contrasting with modern western mechanical causation: Nature is Life: it is the field of various circles of life processes. By identifying the power of perception as the heart of such life processes, I propose to redefine this Chinese mode of thinking as “perceptual cosmology” instead of “correlative cosmology.”

A true appreciation of early Chinese perceptual cosmology requires a detachment from modern western model of clockwork universe presuming all actions in Nature as regulated by the objective laws or mechanism. Cotemporary interpretation of ganying as a mechanism of “stimulation and response” assumes it as a mechanical process of action and reaction. But this mechanical interpretation cannot explain how gan (感 affection/perception) is central to all interactions, viz. how ganying (sympathetic and spontaneous resonance), as the neo-Confucian Cheng Yi asserts, is central to all processes in Nature.

Reexamining ganying in the Yijing, my study recovers the primordial Chinese experience of Nature as a field of spontaneous love and sympathy pivoting on the yinyang intercourse as the archetype for the generation of all beings. All causation and interaction are predicated on how successful the loving process of yinyang intercourse takes place, on the clicking/aha moment that evokes of mutual perception and participation between various beings into the state of affection (ganying). I will illustrate how this early Chinese idea of nature may throw a new light on the philosophical meanings of the key early Chinese ideas of yin and yang, wuxing (five phases/natures), and the meanings of persons and things.

Title: Affective Knowing in Wang Yangming

Presenter: Stephen C. Angle

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Abstract: Wang Yangming (1472-1529) has provoked controversy from his day to our own with his teachings about varieties of knowing (*zhi* 知). A notable dimension of Wang's theoretical philosophy is his repeated insistence that the inherent reality of both the heartmind itself, and of knowing, is deeply affective in nature. While scholars have often noticed Wang's emphasis on affect, we argue that affect is more basic to Wang's view than almost any previous interpretation has recognized, and also endeavor to explain the role played by affect in an unusually thorough manner. We explain what it means to say that inherent reality is affective and explore the various dimensions of affect—including fear, joy, and sorrow—that jointly characterize this inherent reality, which as a unified whole we label “primordial joy.” On this basis, we argue that the heartmind's primordial joy can be understood as self-sustaining and self-correcting, which then leads to the essay's analysis of Wang's innovative notion of *liangzhi* 良知 and other varieties of knowing. On our account, *liangzhi* is the heartmind's primordial joy as viewed through the lens of its responsiveness to the myriad things in the world. We argue that Wang's concepts of “extended knowing” or “genuine knowing”—which are the same thing—are nothing more than pure episodes of *liangzhi*. Taken as a whole, Wang's account of the heartmind's ways of knowing is consistent and distinctive, notable both for its influence within Neo-Confucianism and its potential to catalyze new lines of thinking today.

Title: Reverence, Self-Cultivation and Study: Why Quiet-Sitting is Important for Zhu Xi

Presenter: Wu Yidi

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Abstract: Zhu Xi (1130–1200) stands at the pinnacle of the Song dynasty's Neo-Confucian revival, yet one of his most practical subjects—quiet-sitting (*jingzuo* 靜坐)—remains understudied in relation to his evolving philosophical commitments. This paper excavates the sixty-six references to quiet-sitting in the *Categorized Conversations of Master Zhu* (《朱子語類》) and twenty-six in the *Collected Writings of Master Zhu* (《朱子文集》), reframing them against the shift in his thought from the “old insight” to the “new insight” on equilibrium and harmony (*zhong-he* 中和). The former, shaped in dialogue with but not dependent upon Zhang Shi (張栻, 1133-1180)'s Hu Xiang School (湖湘學派), posits a rigid binary between unperturbed nature and manifest heart-mind. The latter, formed in 1169, dissolves this binary into a continuous heart-mind whose quietude and activity are two respective states of unmanifested and manifested—an intellectual turn that aligns himself with Chen Yi (程頤, 1033-1107)'s rationalism tendency and emphasis on reverence (*jing* 敬). Within this trajectory, quiet-sitting emerges as more than a vestigial borrowing from Buddhist or Daoist meditative techniques. It becomes a Confucian discipline of reverence (*jing* 敬), self-cultivation (*hanyang* 涵養), and study (*dushu* 讀書). For Zhu Xi, quiet-sitting is to concentrate the heart-mind, align human

nature with Heaven and Earth, and prepare for the rigorous investigation of principles. His oft-cited recommendation of “half-day sitting, half-day study” is not a quaint aphorism but a pedagogical model for integrating practice and theoretical inquiry. In an era of fractured attention and intellectual superficiality, his synthesis of quiet-sitting and scholarly labor challenges us to rethink what it means to cultivate both mind and self.

Title: Han Feizi, Digital Surveillance, and Privacy

Presenter: Chen Nalei

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Abstract: Han Feizi (c. 280 BCE–233 BCE) was an ancient Chinese philosopher whose ideas greatly influenced Chinese political practice. A core idea of his philosophy is that most humans are driven by self-interest, which often conflicts with the state’s interests, such as maintaining order and stability. Therefore, as a strong supporter of the state’s interests, Han Feizi argued that an efficient system of incentives must be established to properly control and modify people’s behavior. The increasing use of digital surveillance has attracted much scholarly attention in recent decades. If Han Feizi lived in modern society, he would probably support the advanced digital technologies of surveillance, considering their apparent benefits, such as enhancing government surveillance and societal control. However, does this mean he endorses extensive use of these technologies to the extent that privacy is seriously undermined? While some evidence from Han Feizi’s texts suggests this line of thinking, I believe a moderate interpretation of his philosophy provides strong reasons to oppose such widespread use of such technologies: since privacy is a valuable personal interest, overusing these technologies could undermine the essential incentives for a functioning ruling system. Therefore, Han Feizi would probably present an “instrumental” reason for safeguarding privacy and limiting surveillance—a practical reason any government heavily relying on such systems must consider.

Title: Narratives of Humility and Gratitude: Daoist and Indigenous Perspectives on Anthropocentrism

Presenter: Hu Jianping (Eunice)

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Abstract: Anthropocentrism literally means “human-centeredness.” In environmental ethics, it refers to the values and practices in which human interests are prioritized over other non-human

beings and non-beings (Hayward, 1998; 2002). Anthropocentrism has given rise to debates around its theory as well as practices. For example, Deep Ecology stresses the intrinsic value of the non-human world and rejects the “shallow,” anthropocentric ecology (Næss, 1973; 1986; with Sessions, 1984). Norton develops the concept of Weak Anthropocentrism, arguing that human partiality is inevitable and that weak anthropocentrism can avoid some fundamental problems associated with strong anthropocentrism (Norton, 2003; 2007). Drawing upon early Daoism and Indigenous narratives, this paper explores two central questions: “Is anthropocentrism truly unavoidable?” “What can we learn from ancient Non-Western wisdom about the human-nature relationship?” Inspiring stories from the *Zhuangzi* and Native American traditions offer valuable insights into humility and gratitude toward the non-human world. First, stories of the frog in the well and summer insect in the *Zhuangzi* imply that human partiality is inevitable due to the limitedness of our perspectives and experiences. The tale of Peng, the giant bird, and the cicada and the dove, suggests a profound response to the unavoidable human partiality: recognizing that there are perspectives other than one’s own and that there is a plurality of ways of seeing the world (Lai, 2013). It requires the development of humility. Second, “Skywoman Falling,” the Indigenous story of the creation, depicts a moving image of unwavering generosity and sacrificial love (Kimmerer, 2013). The world, gifted to humanity by geese, otters, beavers, sturgeons, and turtles, calls for deep gratitude and reciprocal care for our Mother Earth and all the non-human beings that live within. Therefore, the ultimate goal of Lakota life is being “a good relative” to animals, trees, grass, rivers, land, and air (Deloria, 1944; Howe and Young, 2016). Through Daoist and Indigenous narratives, the author of this paper believes that cultivating humility and gratitude can foster a nurturing relationship of mutual care and interdependence between humans and the natural world.

Title: Privacy and Privacy Culture in Modern Chinese Law

Presenter: Song Zeyi

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Abstract: Historically, Chinese society did not possess a concept of “privacy,” nor did Chinese law recognize a right to privacy. The modern notion of privacy, which emerged and developed primarily in the United States and other parts of the Western world, gradually began to influence China during the late Qing and early Republican periods. China’s privacy culture arose from an interplay between indigenous intellectual traditions and the impact of foreign law. In the traditional Chinese intellectual context, *public* (*gong*) and *private* (*si*) were fundamentally distinct, and the closest analogue to privacy—*yinsi* (隐私)—carries markedly different connotations. While exposed to Western privacy rights and cultural ideals, Chinese society did

not simply adopt an individualistic model of privacy. Instead, it developed a public-oriented conception of privacy rooted in a history of governance-oriented political culture and collectivist social ethics. This nonlinear development reflects both the tensions and the synthesis between traditional Chinese thought and Western cultural influences. It has shaped the reception of Western privacy concepts in China and slowed the legalization of the right to privacy. This paper examines the meaning and transformation of privacy and the right to privacy in modern China from both legal and sociocultural perspectives, contributing to a deeper understanding of the Chinese distinction between public and private and the evolution of its privacy culture.

Title: Dao as Prime Matter

Presenter: Hao Hong

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Abstract: In this paper, I argue that prime matter in the Aristotelian metaphysics and Dao in the Daoist metaphysics (especially in *Daodejing*) point to the same indeterminate, imperceptible, and ineffable aspect of reality that is “hidden” behind a world of concrete, perceptible things, but the two traditions’ different meta-metaphysical concerns—especially their understandings of what kind of explanation is the primary concern of metaphysics—lead them to hold different views on the ontological priority of prime matter or Dao. In other words, while the two traditions hold similar views about what there is, they offer different answers to what is fundamental or ontologically prior. To develop my view, I first show that both the Aristotelian and the Daoist recognize that the world is populated with concrete particulars, which instantiate determinate forms or features, and that there is an indeterminate, imperceptible, and ineffable aspect of reality. Next, I argue that, sharing similar views on what there is, the two traditions contain different frameworks of metaphysical explanation. The Aristotelian is concerned with the essences of independent, unified, and determinate particulars and aims to explain what makes something what it is; prime matter plays a limited role, if any, in this explanatory project. By contrast, Daoism takes individual particulars to be spontaneously generated and transformed without any “sufficient reason”. What needs to be explained is the foundation or ground for the plentitude of all kinds of different things in the universe, that is, what makes the spontaneous generation of all kinds of things possible. I further argue that Dao, like prime matter, contains the pure potentiality for every possible being; while which potential is actualized at which spatiotemporal region is spontaneous and brute, Dao explains why the spontaneous generation of everything is possible at all in the first place.

Title: The Role of Concepts in Zhuangzi’s Skill Stories

Presenter: Danesh Singh

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In this presentation, I give an account of the role of distinctions in skillful activity, as described in the skill stories of the Zhuangzi volume. I engage scholarly readings of Zhuangzi's thought that have noted how the writers of Zhuangzi believe the use of distinctions are helpful for facilitating the skillful activity of skill masters. I hope to show that without the use of distinctions, skill masters would be unable to exercise skillful activity. When skill masters are in a state of total absorption in a given activity, distinctions may not be conscious, but they are being employed, nonetheless. And in those moments in which distinctions are closer to awareness, skill masters face novel situations in which they employ distinctions consciously to improve their performance. My reading will focus largely on the skill stories involving the wheelwright, the cicada catcher and the butcher.

I will focus on four aspects of distinctions in Zhuangzi's skill stories, specifically. First, although some degree of awareness of distinctions is sometimes present, skill masters do not need to be aware of the distinctions they are employing for them to be operative in skillful activity. Second, distinctions are represented in the body, rather than just in the mind. Third, distinctions help skill masters to internalize and learn skillful activity. Fourth, distinctions come from experiences in memory, due to habituation, which are activated by the body. I hope to develop these four aspects in the hope that it will offer a clearer picture of the role of distinctions in Zhuangzi's skill stories.

3-Talk Panel Entitled: Chinese Social Metaphysics

Abstract: This panel explores how Chinese philosophical traditions—specifically Confucianism, Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism—address metaphysical questions about the social world. While contemporary social metaphysics has recently emerged as a flourishing sub-field directing philosophical attention to the nature of the social world, the relevant issues have been deeply engaged with throughout Chinese intellectual history.

The three talks examine a set of interconnected social metaphysical questions: How are persons related to their social roles? How do social roles and identities come to exist? What grounds their normativity and reality? How do human practices, ethical engagement, and conceptual frameworks shape social reality?

Each talk offers distinct answers—whether understanding persons as constituted by roles and relationships, treating social identities as conventional constructs open to revision, or grounding social reality in the mind's ethical engagement with the world. This panel brings these contrasting yet complementary approaches into conversation with contemporary social metaphysics, demonstrating how Chinese traditions provide sophisticated ways for understanding social construction and normativity. By exploring how contemporary analytical tools can enrich traditional views and how Chinese philosophical insights offer fresh

perspectives on current debates, the panel reveals that Chinese philosophy has long grappled with—and developed distinctive solutions to—core questions in social metaphysics.

Title: The Source of Normativity in Confucian Role Ethics

Presenter: Jennifer Wang

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Abstract: Inspired by early Confucian texts, defenders of Confucian role ethics argue that persons are constituted by their social roles and relationships. This view leads to intriguing questions about the metaphysics of personhood. But it also has normative implications, for role ethicists argue that a person's social roles and relationships are the source of ethical normativity. However, a problem arises once we consider that some social roles and social expectations, like that of a thief, are bad. There must be some constraint on which roles and expectations are adequate for grounding ethical normativity. Critics of role ethics argue that this shows that virtuous dispositions are more fundamental than roles.

This paper explores a response on behalf of the role ethicist that locates the source of ethical normativity in a socially constructed notion of rén (仁), the highest virtue. Being rén is not an intrinsic quality that persons can exemplify independently of others; it is partly constructed by social roles and successful social relationships with others, where the relevant norms are encoded in ritual (lǐ 禮). This model provides an alternative to recent accounts of social normativity in feminist metaphysics, e.g., Charlotte Witt's artisanal model, which takes the craftsperson as its central example. The resulting discussion will outline new ways in which early Chinese philosophy and contemporary metaphysics intersect.

Title: From Conventional Identities to Conceptual Engineering: A Buddhist Approach

Presenter: Li Kang

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Abstract: Buddhism is renowned for its doctrine of non-self, which denies the existence of substantial, enduring soul-like entities that possess and control physical bodies and mental states. Although there are no selves, through the lens of conventionality, there are persons and social identities. These conventional constructs emerge through processes of conceptual imputation embedded within specific contexts of practice and purpose. This talk develops Buddhist social

metaphysics as a social construction theory and shows how Buddhist philosophy engages with contemporary social metaphysics. By analyzing the Buddhist concept of conventionality (su 俗), I construct an interest-based account of conventional identities. On this account, both personhood and social identities gain their apparent stability not through inherent existence but through networks of collective engagement. Different practical purposes and contexts shape how conceptual boundaries are drawn and maintained within particular communities. This Buddhist framework both facilitates and necessitates conceptual engineering, which involves assessing, revising, and improving our conceptual schemes to better understand and possibly transform social reality. Moreover, the Buddhist tradition's emphasis on skillful means (quan 权) suggests that conceptual revisions should be evaluated by their capacity to reduce suffering and promote flourishing.

Title: Social Reality Constructed Through Human Ethical Engagement: Wang Yangming and the Ethical Grounding of Social Metaphysics

Presenter: Liu JeeLoo

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Abstract: Social metaphysics investigates how social kinds, institutions, and norms depend on human practices to constitute social reality. To say that “*everything* is socially constructed,” however, can appear to be “a short step to the conclusion that there is no reality independent of our practices or of our language and that ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ are only fictions...” (Haslanger 2012, 84).

With his famous tenet, “Mind is principle,” Wang Yangming contends that there is no transcendent existence external to the human mind, nor are there pre-established, mind-independent universal norms in individual lives. For Wang, outside human experience there is no reality to speak of, because the mind contributes to the structure and taxonomy of the world. His metaphysics can be interpreted as a form of social metaphysics. Yet Wang Yangming's view is not anti-realist: the constructed social reality is real in a robust sense, since it is the only reality that matters to us.

The taxonomy of particular things in nature is not “ready-made” but emerges from human collective ethical concerns and pragmatic needs. This approach links the particular principles in things directly with human understanding and engagement. The myriad principles constitute the structure we impose on the world. The construction of knowledge and meaning is thus fundamentally intertwined with our ethical and practical engagements. We bestow form and organization upon the world, rendering things intelligible to us.

This talk will analyze how reality is “socially constructed” in Wang Yangming’s metaphysical view. It will focus on both the individual’s *intentionality-qua-thing* and human collective ethical engagement as the two dimensions of the construction of social reality. I aim to show how Wang Yangming provides an ethical grounding for metaphysics by embedding values and norms into the very fabric of the world. His social constructivism is thus a form of moral realism.

Title: Native Abilities and Situational Goodness in Mengzian Thought

Presenter: L. K. Gustin Law

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Abstract. On Mengzi’s teaching, we all have native dispositions that are meant to fully manifest themselves as virtue. For Aristotle, the emergence of virtue is not such a process because he acknowledges no native dispositions that are directed toward virtue. Aristotle does not deny that if we were to look at a virtuous person’s past, we could find native dispositions that resemble virtues that they now possess. However, since he thinks that the native dispositions are fallible and harmful, he apparently appraises them to be no more good than bad. There is evidence that Meng is not oblivious to our native dispositions’ fallibility either, and yet he appraises some to be more good than bad: ethically felicitous deliverances are attributable to these endowments in a way infelicitous ones are not attributable (若夫為不善非才之罪也). Is he then guilty of the what-is-flattering-is-true bias in asserting such attributive asymmetry? I suggest that he may not because, unlike Aristotle, Meng conceives some dispositions as nascent abilities to get things right (良知, 良能). I show that this conception supports the picture of attributive asymmetry, which in turn countenances the idea that every human is readied to be good in some situations, and this native situational goodness is itself instrumental to (1) truly understanding a pivotal statement in the Mengzi (乃若其情則可以為善矣), to (2) reconciling what appears to be four inconsistent views of Meng’s, and to (3) addressing a reservation about morality even for someone who suspends the rationality of being moral. The interpretation has these three payoffs independently of a bold metaphysics about human nature that has been attributed to Meng by a reading that has held sway for centuries.

Title: Can Virtue Humiliate? When Moral Exemplars Cause Shame in One

Presenter: Jing Iris Hu

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Abstract: Curiously, shame can sometimes arise as a response to others' kindness and virtuous acts, instead of demeaning insults and hurtful words. This paper investigates this peculiar emotional phenomenon of shame as a response to other people's kindness and moral excellence; it challenges dominant theories of shame that views it as a result of either public exposure or personal failure. It also raises questions regarding seeing shame in terms of moral commitments one makes prior to shame experiences. I call this phenomenon, tentatively, moral exemplar induced shame. In our interaction with moral exemplars, we may become aware of not our inherent flaws but the distance between us and exemplars we come to admire—the shame arises not only make us critically examine our deeds but also our moral values and personal ideals. The discussion in this paper invites us to rethink about morally meaningful interactions and relationships with others and the role that even “negative” emotions like shame can play in one's moral development.

Title: Constructing Noble Selves: How Mengzi Uses Nature Claims to Foster Identity and Motivate Action

Presenter: Hagop Sarkissian

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Abstract: What's the point in Mengzi saying people have good natures if he thinks people are essentially hostage to their environments? Why don't the sprouts play a more central role in everyday decision-making in the text? The only clear examples of "sprout activation" depict alarming scenarios involving death—the child falling in the well (2A6), the ox about to be slaughtered (1A7), and the sight of parents' corpses (3A5). How does this help in daily life? And why does Mengzi say that how we think and talk about nature is a simple choice that does not actually cut nature at its joints (7B24)?

These puzzles suggest that something else is happening with nature claims. In this presentation, I argue that Mengzi's claim that human nature is good is designed to establish sustainable motivation to do good as opposed to describing fixed psychological facts—to foster self-identification with moral capacities, and not to describe reliable tendencies. The analysis centers on passage 2A6, where we are told that a noble life begins with self-affirmation—people must first identify the capacity for goodness as genuinely part of themselves (有四端於我) and feel shame at denying such capacity. "I have nobility in me" is a more sustainable foundation for motivation than external commands or emotional appeals.

The fully engineered identity cycle operates as follows: nature claims foster noble self-conception → this undermines callousness and enables good actions → social recognition

validates this identity → stronger identity enables more consistent action. This creates self-reinforcing motivation that also fosters joyous bonds with others. For rulers, it makes them fathers and mothers in their subjects' eyes. Goodness then feels like self-realization rather than self-denial.

Title: Locating Confucian Human Dignity

Presenter: Emily Kluge

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Human dignity is a central concept in contemporary moral and political life, yet its philosophical grounding remains unsettled. Attempts to base dignity on an inherent human trait face the well-known “exclusion problem,” and recent Confucian moral-achievement accounts have claimed to overcome this difficulty. I critically evaluate these proposals and examine other Confucian resources—such as comportment dignity and rank—to assess their potential as grounding concepts. I argue that neither inherent traits, nor moral cultivation, nor Confucian notions of comportment or rank can secure a universal and equal conception of human dignity. The analysis thus exposes a significant gap in current Confucian approaches. In response, I propose shifting toward a relational model of dignity, one rooted not in traits or achievement but in the rituals and relationships of recognition that render human life possible and meaningful.