

ASIAN 263: Introduction to Chinese Philosophy

Study Guide

University of Michigan at Ann Arbor

Last Edit Date: 04/02/2023

Disclaimer and Term of Use:

1. We do not guarantee the accuracy and completeness of the summary content. Some of the course material may not be included, and some of the content in the summary may not be correct. You should use this file properly and legally. We are not responsible for any results from using this file.
2. Although most of the content in this summary is originally written by the creator, there may be still some of the content that is adapted (derived) from the slides and codes from *Professor Sonya Ozbey*. We use those as references and quotes in this file. Please [contact us](#) to delete this file if you think your rights have been violated.
3. This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

Kongzi:

- 1) Attitude toward punishments?

Answer: Against punishment. Instead, we should gently guide people to behave well.

- 2) Which social unit is the “root” of society? In what ways that social unit is the “root”?

Answer: Family is the root of society. Father is father, son is son.

- 3) What is meant by filial piety?

Answer: A young person who is filial and respectful to elder people can be considered having filial piety. Son covers for father, even the father steals a sheep.

- 4) Which “tradition” are they trying to revive?

Answer: The tradition in Western Zhou.

Mozi:

- 1) Attitude toward funerals?

Answer: People should have moderation on funerals and mourning because they impact the labor force and production.

- 2) Attitude toward music?

Answer: Against musical performance because it is a waste of resources.

- 3) Conception of Heaven?

Answer: Heaven is predictable, a moral agent. Heaven rewards people if they do good things or treat other people well. On the other hand, heaven punishes people if they do bad things or harm other people.

- 4) What does Mozi think about fatalism?

Answer: Against fatalism. Heaven punishes bad people, rewards good people. Heaven cares about people.

- 5) How to reconcile impartial care and filial piety?

Answer: Impartial care means you take good care of other people’s family members, then other people will take good care of your family members. This does not affect filial piety because if everyone follows the procedure above, then everyone will be a filial son, mutual filial sons.

Mengzi:

- 1) How come some people end up being bad people?

Answer: The environment. People in different environments may have different personalities. In some environments, people may behave badly.

- 2) How does he end up justifying regicide?

Answer: If a ruler exploits and harm his people, then he can no longer be called a ruler. In that case, people can kill him.

Laozi: Check out the textbook Chapter 2, 3, 5, 19, 80

Zhuangzi:

- 1) “if people sleep in the damp, their backs hurt and they wake half-paralyzed. But is this true of an eel? If they live in trees they shudder with fear. But is this true of a monkey? Of these three, then, which knows the right place to live...People say that Maoqiang and Lady Li are beautiful, but if fish saw them they would dive deep, if birds saw them they would fly high, and if deer saw them they would cut and run. Of these four which knows beauty rightly?” (pp.221-222) What’s the point of this passage?

Answer: We cannot know anything for certain, cannot give a final answer to anything because in different context (different perspectives), we may have different opinions. This indicates that our rankings and values are conventional, context-dependent.

- 2) The story of the butcher in Chapter Three.

Brief: We can learn knowledge and truth from anyone, regardless of their lowly or noble status. Sage can sometimes has effortlessness, spontaneity, and joy.

- 3) The story of Hundun (All-full) in Chapter Seven.

Brief: Perfected people use their minds like mirrors, not welcoming things as they come or escorting them as they go. They respond without keeping, so they can conquer without harm.

Xunzi:

- 1) What does he mean when he says “human nature is bad?”

Answer: People seek goodness because they lack it, because they are not born good. People seek what they desire and what they value. People have too many desires and desire goodness because they have certain moral impulses that make them desire and value goodness.

- 2) Justification for lavish funerals?

Answer: It is an affirmation of social distinction. Funeral for a ruler should look different than funeral for a minister and so on.

- 3) Justification for music?

Answer: Music is unavoidable human disposition. People listen to it together, experience harmonious joy, feelings of cooperation. Moreover, music can bring hierarchy, which is another affirmation of social distinction.

- 4) Conception of Heaven?

Answer: Heaven is not responsible for misery. It forms a triad with earth and humans, meaning that there are four seasons for the heaven.

Han Feizi:

- 1) Why should a ruler never reveal what he desires?

Answer: Rulers should hide their likes and dislikes, so that ministers will not manipulate them. Moreover, if rulers reveal what his desires, the ministers will cut and polish themselves accordingly.

- 2) The steward of caps doing the job of the steward of cloaks (p.325)...Han Feizi thinks both should be punished. Why?

Answer: By allowing the steward of caps to do the job of the steward of cloaks, the duties of the latter were being neglected. This could lead to chaos and disorder, which Han Feizi believed should be avoided at all costs. In Han Feizi's view, the punishment of both stewards would serve as a deterrent to others who might be tempted to neglect their duties or take on tasks that were not their responsibility.

- 3) If you promise more than you can achieve, you should be punished. But, if you achieve more than you promised, you should also be punished (p.324). Why?

Answer: This can lead to disappointment, mistrust, and loss of credibility. exceeding one's promises could lead to complacency and arrogance.

- 4) Arguments against relying on tradition?

Answer: Family is not the "root." Reporting the crimes of your father is being a good subject. Filial sons can turn out to be traitors. Time has changed. Old methods maybe work in the past by accident. Everyone claims they follow the way of Yao and Shun.

Sun Zi:

- 1) “When one is capable, give the appearance of being incapable.” (Ch.1) Why?

Answer: A psychological tactic. Make your enemy overconfident, so your enemy will underestimate you, which could bring you more advantages to win the war.

- 2) “The methods of waging war holds that it is always the best
To take the opposing country intact,
Whereas destroying the opposing country is the next best.” (Ch.3) Why?

Answer: When you win the war, meaning that the land and the people there are yours. If you destroy everything, you have to rebuild for them. As a result, it is the best to take the opposing country intact.