

Dear Colleague,

Thank you very much for your interest in the NEH Summer Seminar “Traditions Into Dialogue: Confucianism and Contemporary Virtue Ethics,” to take place from Monday, July 7 though Friday, August 15 (six weeks) at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. We both feel that there is a tremendous opportunity right now to stimulate new philosophical growth through broadening the sources drawn on by contemporary virtue ethicists, or those interested in virtues more generally, to include the Confucian tradition. Our goal in this Seminar is to provide a context in which participants can develop the familiarity with Confucianism that they need in order to begin using it in their research and teaching. We also hope to initiate an on-going conversation about the ways in which putting Confucianism into dialogue with other work in virtue ethics can contribute to both. To this end, we will be organizing a conference in Beijing in 2009 on “Confucianism and Virtue Ethics,” and will be able to provide financial support for any participant in the 2008 Summer Seminar who is able to present a paper at the 2009 conference.

The Seminar will be held in the newly expanded Mansfield Freeman Center for East Asian Studies on Wesleyan’s campus. A housing unit nearby, with single rooms for each participant as well as kitchens and ample common space, has been set aside for the Seminar’s participants. Middletown has a vibrant restaurant scene, a lovely New England setting, and easy access to New York or Boston (both under two hours by car) for weekend getaways.

In the rest of this letter we will provide more information about the Seminar’s motivation, program, and setting, as well as a range of logistical details. Please do not hesitate to contact us via email (neh08@wesleyan.edu) or telephone ([860/685-3394](tel:860/685-3394)) with any questions about the seminar that are not covered in what follows. In addition, you will find more information on the seminar’s website: <http://neh08.wesleyan.edu>.

We look forward to considering your application,

Yours sincerely,

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Department of Philosophy
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Michael Slote
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Motivation and Background

Virtue ethics was the predominant approach to ethical theorizing in the ancient Western world, but in modern times, and until relatively recently, virtue ethics was largely dormant. In the past few decades, partly as a result of dissatisfaction with the dominant utilitarian and Kantian traditions, virtue ethics has experienced a remarkable revival, and it now stands with these other two approaches as a leading direction of research in academic

moral philosophy. At first, the revival of virtue ethics was primarily a revival of Aristotelian ethical thought, and certainly some of the most influential work on virtue ethics over the past few years—e.g. by Alasdair MacIntyre, Philippa Foot, and Rosalind Hursthouse—has been of Aristotelian inspiration. However, it has lately been recognized by philosophers like Michael Slote and Stephen Darwall that the moral sentimentalism of the eighteenth century (especially Hutcheson and Hume) is also a rich potential source for virtue-ethical ideas, and work in virtue ethics is now moving in this new direction. In addition, Plato, Stoicism, and Nietzsche are sometimes mentioned as potential inspirations for contemporary work.

A generation ago it was commonplace among Western-trained philosophers to wonder whether there really was such a thing as Chinese “philosophy.” Excellent work (for instance, by P.J. Ivanhoe, Kwong-loi Shun, Roger Ames, and Chad Hansen) over the last two decades by specialists in Chinese philosophy — much of it by some of the first scholars with Ph.D.s in philosophy to write on the subject — has helped to change things, as has the development of a more broad-minded spirit among philosophers in the U.S. The rise to global prominence of China itself cannot but further stimulate the attention that is now being paid to Chinese traditions within professional philosophy in the West. Major presses now carry studies of Chinese philosophy on their lists, and some level of familiarity with Chinese thought is increasingly noted as a desideratum in job listings.

In this context, it is significant that virtue (an apt translation of the Chinese term *de*) is a central notion for many Chinese traditions. Our seminar will concentrate on Confucianism, both in its classical period (roughly 500-200 BCE) and the renaissance of sophisticated Confucian philosophy that is known as neo-Confucianism (roughly 1000-1800 CE). Confucian discussion of *de* is both wide-ranging and deep, covering topics that today we would label ethics, social and political thought, moral psychology, epistemology, and metaphysics. Confucian philosophers are by no means unanimous in their interpretations of *de*, but all accord it importance in their overall understandings of humans, our place in the universe, and the sorts of lives we ought to pursue. In part because of the quite different metaphysical and epistemological backgrounds of these Chinese theories, they are well-positioned to engage in mutual challenge and learning with existing Western discussions of virtue. In a whole variety of ways, dialogue with Confucian philosophers can enrich both the Aristotelian and the sentimentalist ways of doing virtue ethics, and perhaps other Western approaches as well.

To be sure, the genres in which Chinese philosophy comes down to us are often quite different from those with which Western-trained philosophers are familiar; one of the tasks of our seminar will be to help participants work successfully with Chinese genres. Among other things, this will involve highlighting the reasoning that is involved, if not always as explicitly as contemporary philosophers expect, throughout the Confucian traditions we examine.

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge that one of our motivations for pursuing the seminar is simply that we believe robust, cross-tradition dialogue and debate to be a good thing. Rather than Samuel Huntington’s talk of the “clash of civilizations,” we hope that philosophers can contribute to something more like a “conversation among

civilizations.” Or better yet, we want to let go of monolithic categories like “civilizations” altogether and see what happens when philosophers are free to draw broadly on whatever resources seem to them best-suited to their philosophical goals. Plato, Hume, and Nietzsche should be (and, by and large, are) taken seriously outside of Europe and the Americas; in the same way, Confucian concepts and insights should not be the sole property of East Asian peoples. By helping a group of philosophers from the U.S. to acquire the knowledge needed to broaden their philosophical horizons, we hope to facilitate a gradual broadening throughout the U.S. philosophical community. In fact, the U.S. now plays the leading role in English-speaking and broadly European-based philosophy, so it might be hoped that what the Americans learn of Chinese ethics could also affect Western philosophers more generally.

Goals and Schedule

Our seminar is primarily aimed at philosophers interested in virtue ethics, but with little or no background in Chinese philosophy. Our goals are to develop the capacity of Western-trained philosophers to draw on Chinese sources in their on-going philosophical research, and secondarily to facilitate the development of cross-cultural dialogue and professional relationships.

Is it really feasible for newcomers to Chinese materials to acquire enough mastery in six weeks that they can subsequently draw on it freely in their research, as we propose? Our choice of scope — three classical and three neo-Confucian thinkers, on whom more in a moment — is driven by a balance of two factors. On one hand, we want to reveal as much of the richness and complexity of the traditions as possible; in particular, we want to include neo-Confucian as well as classical Confucian authors. Writing and teaching in a very different social and intellectual climate from their classical forbearers, neo-Confucians develop earlier Confucian ideas in important new ways. By including a range of texts, in addition, we ensure that our corpus engages with both neo-Aristotelian and Humean-sentimentalist virtue ethics. On the other hand, we want real engagement with our texts, rather than a superficial overview of a given thinker’s teachings. Our chosen texts are short enough that the one week of intensive study and discussion we have arranged for each of the texts will go a long way toward giving participants what they need to go on and do independent work — even while all should recognize that we are only facilitating the beginning of a research process that will have to continue after the end of the seminar.

As mentioned, we propose to focus on six thinkers. Further detail can be found in the schedule for the Textual Seminar on our website, but brief introductions to the authors and texts follow here.

- Confucius (551 – 479 BCE). His teachings and those of his students, recorded in the *Analects*, set many of the terms of discussion for subsequent “Confucians.” The text’s brevity will allow us to use three different translations of the *Analects* (those of Lau; Ames and Rosemont; and Brooks and Brooks), which will give us

opportunities to discuss in detail some of the differences among interpretive approaches.

- Mencius (mid-4th BCE – early 3rd BCE). Mencius is the “second sage” of the Confucian tradition, author of (at least some of) the eponymous *Mencius*. We will use Lau’s edition, supplemented where appropriate by Van Norden’s new translation (which includes Zhu Xi’s commentary on *Mencius*).
- Xunzi (mid – late 3rd BCE). The third great classical Confucian, and also the most systematic, Xunzi’s thought puts great emphasis on ritual. We will read several chapters from Hutton’s new translation-in-progress.
- Zhu Xi (1130 – 1200 CE). Not the earliest or even (arguably) the most innovative of the neo-Confucians, Zhu Xi is the great synthesizer of neo-Confucianism. He has a stature somewhat comparable to Aquinas in the West, except that the civil service examinations which shaped the Chinese educational system, and which were based on Zhu Xi’s interpretations of the Classics, lasted until 1905. We will read Gardner’s excellent translation of Zhu’s thoughts on moral learning, *Learning to Be a Sage*, as well as selections from other writings.
- Wang Yangming (1472 – 1529 CE). Wang was leading neo-Confucian of the Ming Dynasty, a brilliant critic of Zhu Xi, and an inspiring thinker whose influence was felt throughout East Asia (including on the Meiji Restoration in Japan and on various Chinese revolutionaries in the 20th century). We will read Chan’s translation of his collected writings, *Instructions for Practical Living*.
- Dai Zhen (1723 – 1777 CE). Dai’s *Evidential Study of the Meaning of Terms in Mencius*, despite its rather abstruse-sounding title, is a philosophical masterpiece from the greatest philosopher of the Qing dynasty. He was an incisive critic of early neo-Confucians such as Zhu and Wang and developed his own distinctive way of conceptualizing Confucian virtue ethics. We will read the translation of his *Evidential Study* in John Ewell’s PhD dissertation, as this is the best available.

In each case, we have designed readings that are manageable and discussable within the one-week framework, while also providing supplementary materials and suggestions for additional reading that participants can work from if they choose to pursue a given author further in their own research.

The core of the seminar is the *Textual Seminar*, which will meet three times a week (Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings) for two and a half hours. Everyone will have read a relevant text or set of texts and the seminar directors will introduce them to the group and then encourage and perhaps lead discussion of that material. Some of this discussion will elicit ways in which the material being discussed bears on the projects and research within virtue ethics in which different participants in the seminar are already engaged. For example, when discussing *Mencius*, we might highlight work that has been done on his conception of courage, in comparison to various approaches in the Western tradition. Seeing how Chinese material can be useful to one research program can encourage others to mine that material for their own work.

In addition, during the Textual Seminar and/or in supplemental meetings (as needed), several supporting topics will be covered:

- use of specialized electronic resources relevant to Chinese philosophy;
- relevant background in Chinese history;
- basics of the Chinese language and the various systems for Romanizing it;
- state of scholarship on particular texts;
- the large topic of translation, both of texts and of particular terms.

To the extent that additional sessions are needed to cover these topics, we will arrange them in afternoons or evenings, at the participants' convenience. Sessions introducing electronic resources will be held in one of Wesleyan's electronic classrooms, so that all participants can actively learn.

Four times over the seminar's six weeks, we will have visiting scholars join us for a lecture, discussion, and dinner. The following four scholars have accepted our invitations to join us (for more details and their CVs, see our website): May Sim (College of the Holy Cross; specialist on Aristotle and Confucianism), Bryan Van Norden (Vassar College; specialist on Mencius and Chinese thought more generally), Shirong LUO (Simmons College; research focused on East-West comparative virtue ethics, especially of the sentimentalist variety); and Eric Hutton (University of Utah; specialist on early Confucianism, especially Xunzi).

Each Thursday afternoon we will have a *Virtue Ethics Colloquium* for three hours, in which we discuss specific examples of recent work in virtue ethics that are suggestive of possibilities for constructive dialogue with the Chinese materials we have been reading. We will design the readings based on the specific background and interests of the Seminar's participants. Participants will also make presentations each week on the readings. In the Colloquium, directors and participants will together think through questions like: how does current literature draw on historical sources, and how should this influence our approach to our Chinese texts? What topics are at the forefront of contemporary concern in virtue ethics, and why? How might this be inflected by bringing Chinese materials into the discussion?

Finally, because the seminar is designed to open participants up to new directions for their research, we do not expect the completion of a research project during the seminar, but instead look for the beginning of a new project. As mentioned at the outset, the directors will be co-hosting a conference in Beijing in 2009 and hope that many of the participants' projects will have matured enough by then to be presented at the conference.

Location, Housing, and Finances

Wesleyan University's Mansfield Freeman Center for East Asian Studies is an ideal context for our seminar. Most activities will take place in the Center's brand-new Seminar Room, which is outfitted with a full range of A/V and computer equipment, and has a floor-to-ceiling glass wall overlooking the Center's Japanese garden. The Center also has computers and limited office space available for use during the day, wireless access

throughout the facility, and will house the staff (one full-time administrative assistant and one student research assistant) who will handle the logistical details of the seminar. Participants will also have full use of Wesleyan's library and information technology resources, including numerous on-line indexes, full-text databases, and other research aids that are specific to philosophy and to Asian studies, respectively.

Noting that the most important time during academic conferences is often the coffee break, we recognize the importance of informal opportunities to reflect, brainstorm, and synthesize — as well as to build a sense of collective purpose among participants, directors, and staff. We will therefore arrange social occasions in which we can spend unstructured time together. After each lecture by a visiting scholar, we will have a reception, and on selected Thursdays, we will follow the Virtue Ethics Colloquium with a reception as well.

Middletown is a charming New England city with a thriving restaurant scene, a multiplex movie theater on Main Street, and ready access to all manner of outdoor activities. It is within half an hour of New Haven and Hartford, and two hours of New York and Boston, so a wide variety of day- or weekend-trips are possible. We have arranged for housing to be arranged in a newly built "prototype house" on the corner of Wesleyan's campus; the house has 15 single rooms as well as kitchens and ample common space. Each room has cable and internet hookups (as well as wireless internet coverage), and laundry facilities are close by. We will do our best to help out with those who would prefer a different living arrangement.

The NEH provides participants with a stipend of \$4200.00. This stipend is meant to help cover the costs of travel, housing, and meals; many people will find this amount ample. Anyone who anticipates that the stipend will not cover all costs is encouraged to apply for support from his or her home institution. Participants who elect to take advantage of the housing provided by Wesleyan will (with written permission) have the sum of \$1340 deducted and submitted to the University on their behalf. One-half of the remaining stipend will be distributed to participants at the first meeting. The second half of the stipend will be distributed at the beginning of the fourth week. Participants will need to make their own travel arrangements.

Finally, although details are still being worked out, all participants in the seminar will be encouraged to submit papers to the conference in Beijing on Confucianism and Virtue Ethics that the seminar's directors are planning for spring or summer, 2009. All seminar participants who give papers at the conference will be eligible for significant financial support to defray expenses associated with the conference.

Application and Selection of Participants

Participants will be expected to have completed a PhD in philosophy and to have a demonstrated research interest in virtue ethics or a closely-related topic. No background in

Chinese language or philosophy will be assumed or expected, though individuals with such background are welcome to apply.

The application is on our website at <<http://neh08.wesleyan.edu/applying.html>>. Please note that a complete application includes:

- an Application Cover Sheet which must be filled out online at the NEH web address <<http://www.neh.gov/online/education/participants/>>, submitted electronically, and then also printed out (see below);

and three copies of each of the following, which should be sent to the address below:

- the printed Application Cover Sheet;
- a detailed curriculum vita;
- an application essay;
- and two letters of reference (Please ask each of your referees to sign their name across the back of the sealed envelope containing their letter).

Perhaps the most important part of the application is the essay, which should include any personal and academic information that is relevant; reasons for applying to this particular seminar; your interest, both intellectual and personal, in the topic; qualifications to do the work of the project and make a contribution to it; ways that your research goals will be enhanced by participation; and the relation of the seminar's subject to your teaching. Your completed application should be postmarked no later than 3 March, 2008 and addressed to:

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