Good morning everyone, today we're going talk about Xunzi.

Not very much is known about the historical Xún Kuàng, but his life was something of a biographical inverse of Mengzi’s: he successfully obtained office twice and was well-regarded in his time, but eventually his writings fell out of favor. One hypothesis is that this might be because he had two famous students, Lǐ Sī and Hán Fēi Zǐ, who went on to play important roles in the Qin dynasty, which was the first real dynasty of unified China. *Unified China*. In other words: the end of the Warring States Period. [MAP 1] We go from this to this. [MAP 2] Some believe that Xunzi may actually have survived to see this. Here are a couple of interesting facts about the Qin Dynasty. It's known for standardizing [SLIDE] currency, weights and measures, and a writing system throughout the empire, which Xunzi (and Mozi) probably would have approved of. But it’s also known – it’s notorious, in fact – for trying to suppress the past and anything that might make the people rebellious, including the very texts we're reading for this course. There was a very well-known incident [SLIDE] called "the burning of books and burying of scholars" in which Li Si is thought to have advised the emperor to burn a large number of Confucian texts and bury alive a laege number of Confucian scholars, which Xunzi and Mengzi obviously would have been very unhappy about! (However, later scholars have pointed out even though many books were destroyed, two copies of the texts were in the emperor’s library; moreover, there is doubt now whether the scholars were actually buried alive. The Grand Historian Si Ma Qian, who wrote about the incident, is an extremely famous and important figure, and considered the father of Chinese historiography. But he was writing in the dynasty just after the Qin dynasty, and so would have some incentive to portray them negatively.)

Most people know that Xunzi is the rival of Mengzi; the tagline for his view is that "human nature is bad." But, just as we saw last week, things are going to be a bit more complicated than that. In today’s lecture, [SLIDE] I am going to start by saying a little bit about why I think Xunzi disagreed so strongly with Mengzi, which has to do with his views on moral learning. Then I’m going to explain his views on why ritual is so important, and then we’ll move on to his view of human nature (what we would nowadays call ‘moral psychology’). And finally, I’ll finish up with quick word about his philosophy of language (on ‘naming’).

If you'll bear with me a little bit, I'm going to tell you how I've been imagining the disagreement between Xunzi and Mengzi. Now, Mengzi strikes me - in part due to our fabulous lecture last week - as kind of like, a motivational speaker. [Poster] He's all like, "You can be a good person! If you seek it, you shall have it." [Poster] "Hang in there! If you abandon it, you shall lose it." I mean, look at [4A27 quote].

And I just imagine Xunzi rolling his eyes and being like, "That's greeeat, Mengzi. Is this guy serious?"

Because here's how Xunzi feels about moral learning: [Beast]

So I just imagine him being like, this hardcore fitness trainer or boot camp leader. I mean, he's more like, [Not good at 1] "Drop and give me a hundred! 99 isn't good enough!" [Not good t 2]

Or maybe, maybe he's like that guy with the fitness app [App], who's just at it all the time. So he says: "The gentleman -

Ok, quick word on terminology here - in case you haven’t checked the glossary in the back of your book yet. "Gentleman" is used because it literally means the "son of a lord," but this is another case where there's a distinction between a person who holds some title because they happen to be in that social role, a mere king or a mere gentleman because they were born into it, and a person who fulfills that role virtuously - a person who *lives up to that role*, we might say, or who *deserves the title* of king or gentleman. So for my purposes I might sometimes just say "benevolent person."

Xunzi says in Ch. 1: The benevolent person knows that whatever is imperfect and unrefined does not deserve praise. And so they repeatedly recite their learning in order to master it, ponders it over in order to comprehend it…makes their eyes not want to see what is not right, makes their ears not want to hear what is not right, and makes their heart not want to deliberate over what is not right."

So no wonder he's so annoyed with Mengzi, because, like, morality is hard. It's hard to live to up to it, so what good is all this feel-good namby-pamby kitten stuff? This is morality we're talking about it. [If it tires your body but it's the right thing, do it! If if involves little profit but it's the right thing, do it!] Morality is serious stuff. It's *demanding*. And moral learning is long and hard and slow.

Now, I don't think that Mengzi would really disagree - so thanks for indulging me in my little caricatures. But what Xunzi is worried about is that all this "human nature is good" is going to undermine people's belief in the importance of Confucian teachings and ritual. He says, and he specifically names Mengzi here: "Does he really think that people’s nature is originally correct, ordered, peaceful, and controlled?" [Then what use would there be…?]

And remember this is a real problem for Xunzi, because he's living in a time where ritual is being problematized, where there are many different competing schools of thought, including Mozi leading the charge against lavish funerals and music and ritual. So for Mengzi to go around saying like "follow your heart!" (ok, I'll stop being unfair now!) he thinks is very counterproductive.

Now before I get to Xunzi's theory of ritual, I want to stop and consider: why exactly does he think morality is so demanding? Why does it take so much deliberate effort from us?

Well, for one thing, proper moral learning results in a *wholesale complete transformation of self*. [Loves it 1 and 2]

Can you read this and not want to be virtuous? So I actually find Xunzi quite motivational as well. But most of us are probably quite far away from being like this, so it will take us a whole lot of learning to get there.

But for another thing, Xunzi is very sensitive to the absolute complexity of being good and doing the right thing. He's very alive to the fact that rules by themselves aren't enough, and that you need *expertise* in order to know how to actually understand and follow them. [Rules 1 and 2]

So here's a very simple example. If I gave you this sequence of numbers and told you the rule is to add 2, what would you say comes next? [10,12,14…]

But how do you know that this isn't what I meant, that you should keep adding 2's for infinity? [2,2,2…]

And just imagine how much more complicated the rules of morality are! So this is why Xunzi thinks it's so important to find a good teacher, who has moral expertise, and follow their lead completely: otherwise, he says, you'll be like the blind leading the blind - or maybe just like the person just adding 2's infinitely…!

All right, so what's the big deal about ritual?

Well, Xunzi thinks that knowledge and practice of ritual is what is needed to put things in order and prevent chaos. And his thinking for this is that we know there was in the past a time when there was order, before all the war and horribleness of Warring States period, and that means the people back then knew how to do things right. At the same time, he knows that times change and that doing things right will look different in different circumstances: remember we said that following the Way requires expertise and sensitivity to new situations, it requires constant study and reflection. [Unchanging element] But still, he thinks, ritual - which is handed down from the past - holds the key to figuring out how to do this, because it's a marker that the sage-kings have placed for us: the wisdom of the ages, you might say. [Marker]

How does ritual bring order? Well, by looking at his writings on ritual, we can think of Xunzi as being one of the earliest social scientists. (I know you all love CSI, but let me tell you, all those social sciences - all the natural sciences - those actually all began in philosophy; once problems get cleaned up enough here, that's when they go on to become other disciplines.) So anyway, it's been argued that Xunzi actually anticipates Durkheim (founder of modern sociology, whom you'll meet next year in MST) in the way that he writes about ritual because he's not just recording or giving instructions about ritual, but he's actually analyzing and theorizing about the *functions* of ritual.

The first function is that ritual performs is that it helps us to properly *respond to value.* Basic fact of life: good things and bad things happen. [Fine ornaments] So we respond to good things with good things, bad things with bad things. And note that, contra Mozi, Xunzi actually doesn't believe in lavishness or any kind of excess at all. He's just as critical of doing too much ritual as too little. [Sufficient] So he's critical of people who make a big deal out of showing off how much they're starving themselves out of grief. That's defeating the whole purpose of ritual. Instead, what ritual gives us is the *appropriate response* to value and disvalue. It would be inappropriate to mourn forever over someone you barely know, and just as inappropriate to mourn too quickly for someone who is a family member, because normally, because the mourning ritual is supposed to reflect the value of your relationships. You're supposed to value and have greater attachment to your family members than to complete strangers (at least if everything is going as it's supposed to). Ritual marks this by stipulating that the proper mourning period corresponds to the closeness of the relationship. By studying ritual, by using it as our scale and compass and guide, we learn what is the appropriate way to respond to value and disvalue in the world. [Perfect]

Of course, another basic fact of life is that we *naturally* feel certain ways - joy towards good things and grief towards bad things. And what ritual does is helps us to *express* these feelings in appropriate ways which, again, are *matched* to the value of what's good and bad in the world. So to take some everyday examples of expressing value: how many of you have ever struggled with trying to figure out what to wear or what to bring to a party? You don't want to be overdressed or overly formal, but you want to show that it's a special occasion and dress up a little bit because to show that you appreciate their putting on the party and spending the time together. Or have you ever tried really hard to find someone the perfect gift - not too expensive to make them uncomfortable, but not too cheap either, something that maybe symbolizes an inside joke or a special memory you had together, or that shows you know about their hobbies or interests? Or again, have you ever tried to comfort somebody by trying to think of just the right words, that can show how sorry you are for them, and how you're there for them, but will also maybe make them smile or cheer them up a little bit? Maybe do you *know* someone like that - who's always dressed just right, always says the right thing at exactly the right time? Well that person has mastered the art of ritual, because in a way these are all little rituals that we perform in ordinary life. And so we get this beautiful passage at the end of the chapter on ritual, when Xunzi funeral ritual is done just right. So there's been a ceremony, which has the form of a banquet. A live person is there impersonating/representing the dead person, tasting some food as sacrifices, raising a toast with the host. [Funeral]

So what you get this established way of processing your emotions over time, which I imagine would actually could be comforting and good for your mental health as well: a way of acknowledging that life - like dinner parties - must always come to an end, that we are only guests on this earth for a short time, that we should enjoy it while it lasts…(Of course the better you get at ritual, the better you get at understanding all of these meanings.)

Because there are ways in which your natural feelings might *not* be ethical. If you're a parent and so overcome with grief that you fail to get over it and neglect your other children, for example, or you're throwing things around destroying the house. And so, the thing is that when you express your feelings through ritual, you are also *transforming* them into something ethically good.

Winnie Sung, who's right over the way at NTU, has a paper where she argues that just like you can be a king in name only, in a minimal sense, but not live up to the role of a true king, so too your natural feelings are exist in only a minimal sense until you use ritual to give them ethical content. By transforming your feelings in this way you start to transform into a morally good person.

And notice that's what you get with music as well. [Music]

So all of this helps with another thing worth pointing out, which Winnie also talks about, that Xunzi often puts together the term [SLIDE] li (usually translated "ritual") and yi (usually translated "righteousness" - in our translation, they say standards of righteousness, because yi can refer to those standards and it can also refer to our capacity to conform to those standards, which is why it's such a mouthful in English but much more concise in the original)

And so this is an interesting thing about Xunzi's moral view here: he seems to rejects what contemporary psychologists call the "moral-conventional distinction." [Moral Conventional 1] Here are some examples (note of course that eating with your hands obviously is NOT violating a rule in some culture, in fact the rule *is* to eat with your hands.) A lot research seems to show that very young children don't understand this distinction at first and then they learn it very quickly, but that *psychopaths* don't understand the distinction, so it's viewed as a matter of being morally competent [Moral Conventional 2] that you can draw it. But we might think, with Xunzi, that matters of ritual actually also *are* moral matters, or at least that might be true of ritual that "deserves the title": so when you raise your hand before speaking, it's to demonstrate respect for everyone else, as a sign that you are one amongst many others, that you're taking a turn to speak but that you don't get to just hog all the airtime. Ritual understood correctly *is* moral, and the way you exercise your moral capacity is through the forms prescribed by ritual, so that everyone else also understands that you're being respectful.

So returning to the idea that ritual brings order, one last function of ritual that I want to point out is its role in preserving social harmony. For Xunzi, like pretty much all the classical thinkers (in Greece and elsewhere too), the key to social harmony is everyone knowing their place (and staying in it!). So here's the famous origin story of ritual. You can see the influence of Mozi here: the basic idea is that we all have desires for things which would lead us to fight over them, but through ritual - if we can regulate and transform and express our feelings and desires in properly ordered ways, then we can divide up and distribute the right amount of goods to everyone and prevent fighting. So there's a very famous folktale that I think captures this idea: which literally translates to "Kong Rong giving up the pear" and it's a story of a young boy with a bunch of older brothers, and a visitor comes to the house with a bunch of pears, big and small, and Kong Rong is allowed to pick one, and he picks the smallest one. When they ask him why, he says, "Because I'm the smallest brother, so I should take the smallest pear. My brothers are bigger so they should take bigger pears." So you see why one would hold this idea, that if everyone would just regulate and transform their desires according to their role, we could stop fighting over pears and have social harmony! And Xunzi has his own story [Brothers] about two brothers dividing up their father's property: the father willed it to the younger brother, but the younger brother refused to take it over his elder brother; but then the elder brother refused to dishonor his father's wishes and take it from the younger. So they actually gave it up and moved away from the state.

[Differentiation] So ritual draws these distinctions and assigns every one their different roles. Probably easy to love these differentiations if you're the lord than if you're his servant, but anyway, that's how it's supposed to work: ritual functions to differentiate us so that we can train our desires to match with our roles and our proper share of goods.

Ok, so that obviously bring us to the topic of human nature. But I just want to say one final quick word about the discourse on ritual and also the discourse on heaven. Because Xunzi manages to look at ritual from the "outside" and see the *social functions* it performs, Xunzi argues against Mozi and common superstitions that ritual is not directed toward Heaven or spirits. He doesn't think of Heaven as a kind of entity that intervenes on and reacts to human actions. [Rain sacrifice] Instead he thinks of Heaven as a kind of impersonal nature that is universal and unchanging, but which has patterns in it. Heaven controls environmental conditions in which humans find themselves, we can't control it. [Heaven] What matters instead is how humans respond to those conditions, how well we prepare for it.

Just in the same way, human nature is also this things that we're just given by Heaven, uniform and universal across all individuals: what matters is how individuals *respond* to their nature. The morally good and morally bad person start out with the same stuff, but they respond differently. [Climb] So the really crucial thing here is Xunzi's distinction [Ritual] between what comes about through nature - things that cannot be learned and cannot be worked at and what comes about through deliberate effort, that one becomes capable of through learning and working at them. That's why he has all these metaphors of wood getting steamed and shaped, and metal being honed and sharpened. Another reminder that moral learning is long and hard and slow, because of our original nature.

Which brings us to "human nature is bad." Now, note that Xunzi is not saying that we're all born as evil torturers or murderers or anything like that. He's just thinking of what we are like given our natural dispositions. So a good passage for this is where he says: [5 senses] [Stimulation].

And when you think about it that way, it makes a lot sense. Of course the heart likes things that are beneficial, or in another translation, it likes "profit" because these are the things - and here's some examples - that are things that individuals of course naturally enjoy, because they're good things, just like our other senses enjoy good colors and good sounds and good flavors. So the problem isn't merely having desires - Xunzi even says that lacking desires is in the same category as being dead - the problem is whether or not your desires are going to conflict with others' desires, which depends on whether or not [Guide/Restrain] all of you can both *guide* the desires you have or *restrain* some desires over others. And that's where the heart comes in, because the special thing about the heart is that he says it "rules over" the other organs, and it can engage in deliberate effort. [Deliberation]

So the idea is that in response to some stimulation, there will be some natural feeling - you'll be attracted or repelled to something that you naturally find good or bad - but your heart can decide whether or not you are going to follow that natural inclination. [Prevent…] So maybe you really excessively want that big pear, but if you're virtuous, your heart doesn't let you act to grab it. […Compel] Or you really don't have a desire to do your homework , but your heart makes you do it anyway. This is what in contemporary moral psychology we would refer to as "2nd-order desire": a desire *about* a desire; or "reflective endorsement" - you stand back and reflect on this desire or feeling within you that's trying to move you, and you either endorse it and go with it and let yourself be moved by it, or you disapprove of it and refuse to act on it and refuse to be moved. And the really interesting thing about this, which we today call willpower or what they call in psychology "executive" or "self control" is that it actually is highly predictive of life outcomes - children who have better executive control grow up to have better grades, better health, and better relationships. [Marshmallow] (If you've never watched the Marshmallow Test, I highly suggest that you Youtube it.) What's more, some contemporary psychologists actually do think of self-control as a muscle [SLIDE] that you can strengthen through exercising it [SLIDE], and they even think of morality as the [SLIDE] "moral muscle." What did I tell you about philosophy being the source of it all?

Ok, so the last thing I want to talk about briefly today is Xunzi's view on naming. According to Xunzi, names are purely conventional. [Appropriate] So for example, there's no particular reason why we should make the sound "cat" as opposed to any other sound to refer to little animals with pointy ears and whiskers. I mean, some people say "chat" instead or "gato" or "neko" "mao" or "katz" But once the word "cat" has been agreed upon, I can't just start calling them "sporkles" and saying to you in English "Hey can you take care of my sporkle while I'm out of town" because that's an inappropriate name now and no one will understand me!

So it might be interesting to compare language with ritual: remember we noticed that rituals can be different in different cultures, and that the expert knows how to use it to respond to changes.

And this gets us closer what Xunzi really has in mind - all the names he gives in his writings are actually about more important things than cats. They're about naming things in such a way so as to guide people about what they should and shouldn't do. [Establish] And I want to offer you something that might be a contemporary example of the kind of thing that Xunzi was worried about. In the U.S., but not only the U.S., and especially on college campuses, there's been a lot of discussion about terms like "gray rape" [SLIDE] or "legitimate rape" [SLIDE] or "nonconsensual sex" [SLIDE] being used to describe sexual encounters where there is not clear affirmative consent. And a lot of activists have worried that these new terms, which try to draw distinctions between supposedly different kinds of rape, some of which are supposedly not as bad as others, is really harmful because it allows people to do things and then say "well it wasn't *real* rape," or "it wasn't *rape*-rape" and get away with it. So activists have been fighting for a long time to get definition of rape as anything without clear, affirmative consent. And the idea is that if all laws and school regulations and everything were very very clear about this and nobody made up strange names [Strange Names] to get some people off the hook - then that would get people to always secure consent and to always act in the morally right way and be conscientious in following commands. And that's why it's so important for philosophers like Xunzi to try and find the right definitions, the right names for things, especially for the really important things in life that people are likely to get confused about or to disagree about.

Ok, to sum up: we've talked about Xunzi's views on moral learning, on ritual, on human nature, and on naming.