
Paul R. Goldin’s new introductory textbook is part of the series Ancient Philosophies and, therefore, focuses almost entirely on classical Confucianism, as the author explains in the introduction. The entire history of the tradition from the Han through the Qing dynasties occupies six pages in the final chapter. One wonders why the book was not more accurately titled *Classical Confucian Philosophy*, especially as a forthcoming book in the series is said to be titled *Classical Islamic Philosophy*. Aside from that quibble, this is a very solid introduction that goes well beyond the standard fare by offering original interpretations of several topics.

The introduction is called “What Confucianism Is and What Confucianism Is Not.” The latter category distinguishes Confucianism from topics such as foot
binding, the basic structure of the family (although not the relationships within
the family), and Chinese society as a whole. Since this is a book about Confucian
philosophy, Goldin correctly focuses on the beliefs of Confucius and his followers,
leaving aside rituals and other activities that could be included under the Confu-
cian umbrella, such as life in Confucian academies. He summarizes the central
core of beliefs as follows:

(i) [H]uman beings are born with the capacity to develop morally; (ii) moral
development begins with moral self-cultivation . . . ; (iii) by perfecting oneself in
this manner, one also contributes to the project of perfecting the world; (iv) there
were people in the past who perfected themselves, and then presided over an
unsurpassably harmonious society—these people are called "sages" (sheng 聖 or
shengren 聖人). Not all Confucians agreed about what moral self-cultivation
entails, but all accepted that we can and must do it, and that it is a task of utmost
urgency. (pp. 5–6)

The five chapters of the book are on (1) Confucius and his disciples, (2) the
Great
Learning
and
Canon
of
Filial
Piety,
(3)
Mencius,
(4)
Xunzi,
and
(5) everything after
Xunzi. There is also a six-page appendix on “Manhood in the Analects,” which
basically makes the point that the fundamental virtues espoused by Confucius are
not gendered, even though Confucians for more than two thousand years assumed
that they mainly applied to men. The notes and bibliography are quite extensive,
and there is a useful guide to further reading. The only non-Western-language
items in these sections are primary texts. Chinese characters are included in the
text throughout the book.

Goldin considers the first fifteen of the twenty chapters of the Analects to
reflect more or less accurately a coherent philosophy traceable to Confucius (p. 11).
He rejects the premise of E. Bruce and A. Taeko Brooks that differences in theme
and style of passages of the Analects necessarily imply chronological differences
(p. 124 n. 11). He uses the famous “one thread” passage as an entry point into the
system, but in an original way. In this passage (4:15), Confucius says, “In my Way,
there is one thing with which to string [everything] together,” but he does not say
what that thread is. His senior disciple, Zeng Can, explains to the others, “The Way
of the Master is nothing other than zhong 忠 [conventionally translated as loyalty]
and shu 恕 [reciprocity].” Goldin nicely cuts through the centuries of difficulty
scholars have had explaining this by asking, essentially, why should we take Zeng
Can’s word for it? In another passage, in fact, Confucius himself says that the one
word that can guide one’s practice is shu, and, in fact, it is clear that reciprocity is
more fundamental to his philosophy than zhong. Goldin also deals with another
problematic passage (13:18, on “Upright Gong”) in which Confucius says that
fathers and sons should not report each other to the authorities for theft. The point
here is that filiality (xiao 孝) is the “root of the Way” (1:2), or the basis for public
morality, and to undermine it threatens the whole edifice. There are remaining
questions to be asked, and recent philosophers have discussed these problems
extensively, but the decision to address such problematic issues in a short introduction is a good one.

The chapter on the *Daxue* (Great learning) and *Xiaojing* (translated here as Canon of filial piety) mostly addresses the latter, especially the chapter on remonstrance (*zheng* 獨, translated here as expostulating). This is an important corrective to the nearly universal view that Confucian filiality means absolute obedience to parents. In fact, the chapter clearly states that social subordinates at all levels have the responsibility to point out the errors of their superiors and to argue forcefully (*zheng* means to dispute, fight, contend, strive). True filiality, in other words, implies wanting and helping one’s parent to follow the Way. My only question regarding this chapter is, why was the *Zhongyong* (Centrality and Commonality, or *The Mean in Practice*) not discussed? It is philosophically richer than the *Daxue* and just as important to the later tradition.

The discussion of Mencius includes substantial quotations and generally incisive analyses of key passages (the flood-like *qi* 氣, Mo Di and Yang Zhu, the child and the well, King Xuan of Qi and the ox, one exchange with Gaozi, Ox Mountain, and several others). Goldin defines Mencius’s concept *xing* 性 (the nature of a thing) as “the ideal state that an organism should attain in a conducive environment” (p. 51). But then he defines Mencius’s concept of *ming* 命 (destiny) as “the exalted state that we are expected to attain through our own diligent labour” (p. 55). These definitions seem to describe a distinction without a difference. The problem, I think, lies in thinking of *ming* as anything like destiny or fate. Goldin acknowledges that “destiny is not the fate that has been predetermined for us” (p. 55), but, in my opinion, both words should be abandoned altogether in this context. *Ming* in Mencius is something more like givenness, the brute realities of life that we have no choice about, such as where and to whom we are born and the fact that we will die. This interpretation is consistent with its usage in *tianming* 天命, the mandate or decree of heaven, and with the first line of the *Zhongyong*: “What is given by Heaven is called the nature” (*tianming zhi wei xing* 天命之謂性). It also works with Mencius’s complex argument in 7B.24, where he says, basically, that there is *xing* in *ming* and *ming* in *xing*.

The chapter on Xunzi, perhaps surprisingly, is longer than the one on Mencius (31 and 27 pages, respectively). But Goldin argues cogently that Xunzi was unjustly shunted aside in the later Confucian tradition, and that he is perhaps “the most complex philosopher that China has ever produced” (p. 68), justifying the revival of interest in him in recent decades. Goldin himself published a book on Xunzi in 1999, so he has much to say on the topic. Here we have ample and incisive discussions of Xunzi on human nature, ritual, heaven, warfare, rectifying names, and the mind/heart. On Xunzi’s well-known criticism of Mencius’s claim that human nature is good, Goldin correctly points out that the dispute is not really about the inherent goodness or badness of human beings, but rather about the meaning of the word *xing*. On the substance of the matter, they are in substantial agreement:
both agree that all humans have the potential to become sages, and that education
and other means of external nurturance are necessary in order to fulfill that
potential. For Mencius that additional nurturance normally requires a benevolent
government that provides the basic necessities of life; for Xunzi it requires the
rituals devised by the sages of the past. (How they became sages is not addressed
by Xunzi—a potentially fatal flaw in his argument.) The reason Xunzi claims that
despite this universal potential, human nature is bad, is that he defines xing as that
which develops spontaneously, without education or external nurturance. For
Mencius, on the other hand, the nature of a thing is that which distinguishes it
from other classes of things (he implies this in saying that a person without the
four beginnings of goodness would not be human). Goldin does not mention this
point in Mencius’s argument, but I think it is crucial.

I would differ with Goldin on the meaning of tian 天 (heaven) for Xunzi. He
says, “Heaven plays a sure but indirect role in determining our fortune or misfor-
tune. Heaven never intercedes directly in human affairs, but human affairs are
certain to succeed or fail according to a timeless pattern that Heaven determined
before human beings existed” (p. 82). To me, it is abundantly clear in Xunzi’s
tianlun 天論 (Discussion of heaven) that the “constant Way of Heaven” has no
relevance to the success or failure of human affairs, except insofar as it establishes
the limits of human life and activity. Here again the idea of givenness (ming) is
implied, while Goldin seems to have in mind an idea of predetermined destiny.

The final chapter, as mentioned above, rushes through more than two thou-
sand years of Confucianism in six pages, before settling on a brief but excellent
discussion of Confucianism in the twentieth century and beyond. The discussion
of modernity touches on Max Weber, Liang Qichao, Liang Shuming, the 1958
“Manifesto” by five leading New Confucians, and Confucius Institutes. But Han
Confucianism is discussed with no mention of Dong Zhongshu or yin-yang 順陽
theory; the major Cheng-Zhu figures of the Song are mentioned, but there is
nothing on Wang Yangming (1472–1529) or the kaozheng 考證 (evidential
research) movement. Nevertheless, this book’s basic fairness is demonstrated by
one of Goldin’s concluding points:

Paternalistic governments throughout China’s history have been attracted to
Confucius because they have regarded inculcating deference among the populace
as a Confucian ideal. Were Confucius himself to have discovered how his teach-
ing would be appropriated, he might not have been pleased. (p. 112)

In addition to the quibble about the title mentioned above, I found Goldin’s use
of exceedingly rare words a bit off-putting. He apparently prefers “meiosis” to
“understatement” (p. 11), “pleonastic” to “redundant” (p. 23), “mactated” to “sacri-
ficed” (p. 61), and “flabellum” to “fan” (p. 76). I am all for expanding one’s vocabu-
lary, but . . . mactated?

Nevertheless, Confucianism is an engaging and philosophically incisive
introduction by a scholar who is extraordinarily well read in the secondary litera-
ture, as evidenced by the extensive endnotes. For these reasons, even specialists who may or may not agree with all his interpretations should benefit by reading it. With the proviso that the book be understood as an introduction to classical Confucianism and not the entire tradition, it is most highly recommended.

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Written by historian Jonathan Goldstein, this monograph examines the involvement from 1784 to 1824 of Stephen Girard (b. 1750–1831)—one of the first American millionaires and philanthropists—in the old China trade, the earliest direct contact between the United States and China, from 1787 to 1824.

The first American foray into the Asian Pacific in 1784 not only brought North America into the framework of international exchange in Asia, it also initiated the rapid rise of the United States as China’s second-largest trading partner by the turn of the nineteenth century. Traditionally, two interpretative strands—the dependency and modernization models—have shaped the broad contours of scholarly writing on the early America-China trade. The dependency school contends that the old China trade—the commercial component of a westward Pacific movement by the United States—was intrusive and imperialist, with the United States gaining capital for development at the expense of others. The modernization paradigm, on the other hand, suggests that American enterprise in China ultimately stimulated China’s long-term modernization efforts. Combining these perspectives, Goldstein’s work contributes to the growing body of recent scholarship that emphasizes the complex interactions among competition, profitability, the Chinese way of conducting commerce, foreign notions of free trade, and the changing business environment.

The book is divided into five chapters, grounded in comprehensive secondary and primary sources including the Girard papers, housed at Girard College in Philadelphia. Chapter 1 contextualizes the old China trade that fueled the new nation’s push for overseas trading markets as far away as East Asia.