HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 1: Introduction: God, Nature and Dao
Section 3: Classical varieties of Natural Ethics: Humanism & naturalism2

- We will talk about 2 different varieties of Chinese (non-supernatural) naturalism: nature and human naturalism
- Both Chinese humanism and naturalism are one-world conceptions
    - The humanists emphasize the human sources of ethical guidance
    - The naturalists emphasize the physical sources of ethical guidance
- In the West we have naturalism contrasting with supernaturalism; in China we have naturalism contrasting with humanism
- Chinese humanism is secular humanism
- Two broad categories of Chinese secular humanism
    - Confucius' version: social, cultural, historical
    - Mencius' version: psychological inclinations and reactions
        - Can be mixed with culture but ultimately comes from within, from human psychology
- Natural naturalism (天 *tiān*[nature:sky] naturalism) is a kind of cosmic naturalism
    - Chinese sometimes describe it in terms of yin and yang, and 氣*qì*[breath]
    - The West describes it in terms of matter and energy (or modern divisions into fermions and bosons, baryonic and non-baryonic and so on)
    - The distribution of this physical *stuff* creates paths of opportunities, possibilities and probabilities
- In China, these versions of *nature* naturalism take two forms
    - One completely excludes human sources – we should ignore social/cultural guidance and rely solely on guidance from nature

- The other version emphasizes a blend of both natural and human guidance
  - The internal *way* of finding, choosing among and following natural guiding *daos* is called 德*dé*[virtuosity]

- This course considers all these versions of Classical Chinese naturalism
- The blending, mixing, and adapting how their discussions about natural progress led to intellectual progress
  - We, thus, consider this progressive, constructive discussion *'philosophy'*
  - The alternative view - religious treatment - would emphasize authority
- The progress comes to an end with the close of the classical period in imposition of authority in a political form—the beginning of the imperial dynastic cycle.