

RVP International Seminar 2026

*Self, Solidarity, and Civility**

Meeting Information

- **Date:** September 14, 2026
- **Session:** 13th session, fifth week of the seminar | **Duration:** ca. 4 h.
- **Meeting Type:** Academic seminar — global news discussion + book presentations.
- **Facilitator/Host:** João J. Vila-Chã, SJ
- **Participants:** João (Portugal/Washington DC), Lidia (Poland/Washington DC), Mohan (India), Dian (Indonesia), Maduabuchi Frank (Nigeria), Nubong (Cameroon), Michał (Poland/Washington DC), Ravi Vincent (India), Hu Yeping (Washington DC), Franklin (Peru), Shiva (Sri Lanka), Oleksandr (Ukraine), Adrienne Black (Washington DC).

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Key Outcomes

The session opened with a wide-ranging geopolitical discussion covering Nigeria's upcoming elections, Indonesia, UK food security, the 1973 Chilean coup, Russia's escalating attacks on Ukrainian transport infrastructure, Poland's far-right political rise, and Germany's AfD gains. The seminar then transitioned into formal academic presentations on Sung Moon Kim's *Theorizing Confucian Virtue Politics*, covering Chapters 4, 5, and 6, with particular focus on Mencius and Xunzi's contrasting approaches to virtue, political power, and institutional order. Franklin flagged AI as an urgent topic for the final session on Friday. The group agreed to conclude the week with an introduction to Vardoulakis's *The Agonistic Condition: Materialism and Democracy* (2025) as the final text of this seminar segment.

Global News Discussion

Nigeria

- **Election context:** Presidential election scheduled for January; Maduabuchi provided on-the-ground reporting on campaign dynamics.

* Document elaborated with the Assistance of AI under the Supervision of Prof. João J. Vila-Chã. Before being distributed, the document was submitted to the revision/approval of the Participants in the Seminar.

- **Peter Obi (“Mr. P2B”)**: Former governor of Anambra State, Igbo, and philosopher (graduated 1984); leads the “Obedient Movement,” which is popular among youth and transcends ethnic boundaries.
- **Political obstacles**: Obi was blocked from entering a northern state by what Maduabuchi described as likely stage-managed “youths” acting on behalf of the ruling party, which controls 30 of 36 state governors.
- **Ethnic and structural dynamics**: Power has historically alternated between North and West, excluding the Southeast (Igbo); fear of an Igbo majority drives resistance to a population census — the last one conducted was in 1966.
- **Historical resonance**: The Biafran Civil War was triggered by a coup led by an Igbo officer (Major John Zorgo from Asaba), resulting in the killing of prominent Northern politicians including Abubakar Tafawa Balewa; this history continues to shape anti-Igbo political sentiment.

Indonesia

- Dian reported five journalists missing, hundreds of passengers on a capsized ferry in Surabaya/Kalimantan, and a sudden resignation or removal of the Minister of Finance.

United Kingdom

- Shiva highlighted a government alarm on **food security**: the UK imports approximately **65% of its agricultural produce** from other countries, making it highly vulnerable to climate-change-driven global supply disruptions.
- A car racing event in London featuring South Indian Tamil cinema actors (Vijay, Ajit, Rajit Kumar) was also noted as culturally significant for the Asian diaspora.

Chile / September 11 Dual Significance

- Franklin drew attention to the **1973 Chilean coup** on September 11 — the military overthrow of democratically elected President Salvador Allende, supported by the US government, which brought Pinochet to power.
- The presidential palace La Moneda was stormed; Allende was killed. Franklin emphasized that both the 2001 and 1973 events represent tragedies for democracy, freedom, and human life.
- João noted that the forces at play in geopolitics are rarely what they appear on the surface, and that September 11 carries dual historical weight in the Americas.

Russia–Ukraine War

- **Escalating infrastructure attacks**: Russia has intensified strikes on western Ukrainian transport infrastructure, including areas near the Ukrainian-Polish border and railway facilities.

- **Diplomatic train incident:** A train carrying Boris Johnson and the former Prime Minister of Sweden passed the targeted site minutes before a strike — raising the possibility that the attack was intended to eliminate Western leaders attending the Yalta European Strategy (YES) Security Conference in Kyiv.
- **Michał's analysis:** Boris Johnson was at the YES Conference advocating for the release of **£10 billion in frozen Russian assets** held in London banks and **€140 billion from Brussels** as war reparations — providing a credible motive for the Kremlin to target that train.
- **João's position:** Frozen Russian assets should be legally transferred to Ukraine immediately as stolen funds; Russia should be barred from selling oil and gas for 50 years until reparations are paid.
- **Sanctions weakness:** Michał noted that the destruction of Russian refineries by Ukrainian drones caused a 50% diesel price spike globally, revealing that significant Russian fuel is being smuggled through sanctioned borders to global markets — undermining the effectiveness of Western sanctions.
- **Trump's stance criticized:** João and Oleksandr strongly criticized the US president for complaining about diesel shortages and asking Zelensky to stop striking Russian oil infrastructure, while remaining silent on Russian attacks on civilian and transport targets — including strikes on facilities belonging to American companies (Mondelez, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Philip Morris, Flex) operating in Ukraine.
- **Broader geopolitical concern:** João warned that Russia's tactics represent state terrorism; that the battle is fundamentally for "the hearts of people" through information warfare; and that allowing Russia to emerge victorious would be a shame for all of humanity lasting decades.

Poland — Far-Right Rise

- A member of the European Parliament (identified as "Mr. Brown") destroyed a war monument with a hammer; he lost security clearance and his parliamentary position, but the legal process through EU institutions is slow.
- His party currently polls at approximately **10%** in Poland and is growing, attracting voters dissatisfied with the established party system.
- Lidia flagged serious concerns: the party holds Holocaust-denial positions and is gaining traction ahead of upcoming Polish elections, representing a high risk for democratic stability.

Germany

- Dr. John (Mohan) reported that the **far-right AfD** secured significant seats in East Germany's regional elections, with the party chair claiming that the ruling establishment failed on unemployment, energy prices, migration, and quality of life.

- The AfD predicted it would win the German chancellorship in the next general election; even Merkel's CDU was described as having been "reduced to nothing" in this vote.

BRICS Summit (India)

- Mohan noted that the BRICS summit in India appeared to strengthen Putin's diplomatic position, with many member states supporting Russia and discussing an **alternative reserve currency** to challenge dollar dominance. 23
- BRICS now controls approximately **40% of global GDP** and **50% of global exchanges**, making it a major geopolitical bloc.
- Modi and Xi maintain bilateral differences but worked toward an amicable formula within BRICS; Mohan assessed that Putin "cleverly negotiated his way through."

Philosophical and Reflective Discussion

Adrienne — The Self, the State, and Technology

- Adrienne reflected on the dual nature of waking consciousness: awareness of public events (gas prices, flooding, NFL, political crises) alongside inner, personal experience and dreams.
- She raised Descartes' foundational uncertainty (*cogito ergo sum*) as a framework for questioning what is "real" — including whether reality is defined by the state or by individual inner experience.
- Key concern: citizens have collectively "dived into" AI (Google Gemini, ChatGPT, LMS platforms) without hesitation, even as fears were voiced early; now the state is being looked to for guidance on truth, reversing the individual-to-state trust dynamic.
- Historical parallel: After 9/11, the US went to war using weapons of mass destruction as justification — a claim later proven false — yet citizens had no voice to stop it; she questioned whether citizens have genuine agency or are perpetual observers.
- Closing provocation: Drawing on Alexander the Great, Rome, and the Aztec conquest, she asked whether individuals can do more than observe and critique — whether the self, reformed, can change the world.

João — Political Evil, History, and Philosophical Response

- João argued that by changing the self, we change the state; democracy must be taken seriously as a mechanism of collective transformation.
- He traced a philosophical lineage: Aristotle → Augustine → Aquinas → Descartes → Kant → Hegel, noting that Hegel can serve as a "godfather of imperialism" and that each era requires new philosophical tools.

- Key claim: For the first time in history, individuals without political office can exert real influence through art, narrative, storytelling, and social networks — but this same power is weaponized by states such as Russia through “opinion factories” and countless bot networks.
- Russia’s invasion is described as “anachronistic” — attempting to return to pre-1815 balance-of-power logic that was intellectually resolved at the Congress of Vienna, then reaffirmed through 1945 and 1989.
- **Core philosophical assertion:** Evil is ultimately political — it finds incarnation in figures with absolute, unchecked power (Hitler, Stalin, Putin); the Kantian principle that persons must never be treated as means but always as ends in themselves is the foundational value at stake.
- The “Rape of Nanjing” was invoked as a historical parallel to the current “Rape of Ukraine”: a rapist is never satisfied and must be stopped, not appeased.

Nubong — Africa, Colonialism, and Institutional Reform

- Nubong argued that Africa’s core problem is not colonialism but **management**: institutional ethics, civic education, political leadership, health, and economics.
- He called on African societies to stop “hanging upon colonial heritage” — Africa is not the only continent that experienced colonization, and mental decolonization rhetoric has become a form of narcissism that prevents reform.
- He proposed that the Confucian balance of moral leadership supported by strong institutions could inspire African reform, addressing the tension between traditional authority and modern state structures.
- Closing theological point: Most readings examined in the seminar exclude the divine from society; Nubong argued that the self isolated from the transcendent is a root cause of the moral failures observed globally.

Academic Presentations: Sung Moon Kim’s *Theorizing Confucian Virtue Politics*

Chapter 4 — Psychology of Negative Confucianism (Presented by Shiva)

- **Positive vs. Negative Confucianism:** *Positive Confucianism* concerns the morally authorized, purposive exercise of political power: the ruler should use office, institutions, and state capacity to secure the people’s welfare, cultivate virtue, and realize an ethically substantive public good. *Negative Confucianism* concerns the moral and political restraints on rulers: it seeks to prevent the abuse of concentrated authority by holding rulers accountable to benevolence, righteousness, ritual norms, remonstrance, and, under grave conditions, the loss of legitimate standing.
- **Mencius vs. Xunzi:** Mencius and Xunzi offer two distinct but overlapping models of Confucian political order. Mencius gives priority to the moral heart-mind, humane

government, and the conditional character of rulership under Heaven's mandate; in this sense, he more strongly articulates a "negative Confucianism" that morally limits arbitrary power. Xunzi, while equally concerned with moral cultivation and the welfare of the people, locates durable political authority more explicitly in ritual institutions (*li*), education, and inherited normative standards. For Xunzi, legitimate authority is not secured by the ruler's virtue alone but by the ruler's conformity to—and maintenance of—a ritualized institutional order.

- **Badao and *Realpolitik* as antitheses:** In Mencius, the fundamental political antithesis is not between *badao* and "Realpolitik," but between the hegemonic way (*badao*) and the Kingly Way (*wangdao*). *Badao* names a force-based and advantage-seeking mode of rule closely associated with the strategic, interstate *Realpolitik* of the Warring States period. Mencius develops his normative theory of humane government (*renzheng*) and virtuous kingship as a critique of this political logic: against domination achieved through military power, wealth, and strategic calculation, he argues that legitimate and enduring authority must rest on benevolence, righteousness, popular welfare, and moral transformation.
- **Sage-King vs. Kingship:** During the Warring States period, the ideal unity of sagehood and kingship became increasingly difficult to sustain in political reality: rulers possessed hereditary and coercive authority without necessarily possessing the moral excellence associated with the ancient sage-kings. For Mencius, this divergence between moral authority and political office was a fundamental pathology of his age. His political thought therefore seeks both to restore the ideal of humane kingship and to limit arbitrary rule by subordinating the ruler's political power to moral norms, remonstrance, popular welfare, and the conditional legitimacy expressed in Heaven's mandate.
- **Nietzsche comparison:** Kim uses a qualified Nietzschean comparison to illuminate the Mencian-Confucian moral hero. Like Nietzsche's figure of exceptional human self-overcoming, the Confucian hero displays moral independence and the courage to resist prevailing norms of political success. Yet the analogy is fundamentally contrastive: the Mencian hero is not defined by military conquest, wealth, talent, or the creation of new values. He is defined by principled fidelity to *ren* and *yi*, by independence from rulers and public opinion, and by the courage to confront political crisis without surrendering moral judgment to force, interest, or expediency.
- **Moral individualism:** Drawing on Wm. Theodore de Bary's account of Confucian moral individualism, Kim emphasizes the cultivated person's moral freedom: through self-cultivation, the individual acquires the independent ethical judgment needed to distinguish righteousness from political expediency. This freedom is not atomistic autonomy or release from social obligation; it is independence from the ruler's arbitrary will, from fear, rank, wealth, and prevailing calculations of advantage. Because such a person can remonstrate with, refuse complicity in, and morally judge political

authority, Kim argues that Mencian moral freedom provides the basis for a distinctively Confucian conception of political liberty.

- **Ministers as moral counselors:** In the Confucian normative ideal, ministers were not expected merely to obey the ruler. Their loyal service included *remonstrance*: offering candid but ritually proper counsel, correcting the ruler's errors, and helping to cultivate the moral character required for humane government. A minister who simply flattered or complied with an immoral ruler failed the ethical responsibilities of office; where serious wrongdoing persisted, principled withdrawal from service could be required.
- **Nietzsche vs. Hobbes:** Kim employs a qualified Nietzschean lens—not necessarily a direct Nietzsche–Hobbes opposition—to clarify Mencius's response to Warring States *realpolitik*. Nietzsche's account of self-overcoming helps illuminate an individual capable of resisting conformity, fear, and prevailing measures of success; Hobbes, by contrast, offers a security-centered account in which the pursuit of power serves the preservation of future goods amid mutual vulnerability and conflict. Kim's Mencian moral hero differs from both stereotypes of domination and self-interest: the hero's political significance lies in maintaining independent moral judgment and resisting the reduction of rule to wealth, force, security, or strategic advantage.

Discussion points:

- Mohan raised Ambedkar's warning: hero-worship is dangerous to democracy; Modi's elevation to near-supernatural status in India was cited as a contemporary example of the pathology Mencius warned against.
- Shiva responded that moral individualism in Mencius generates the freedom to criticize power — moral freedom leads to political liberty; Gandhi was offered as a contrasting example of genuine Confucian-style heroism versus Modi's power-hunger.
- Adrienne noted the *Analects'* dialogical, Socratic structure — not presenting fixed theories but revealing a method of thinking through negation and conversation.

Chapter 5 — Xunzi, Badao, and Positive Confucianism (Presented by Oleksandr)

Oleksandr structured his presentation around 12 sequential argumentative steps in Kim's chapter:

1. **Badao vs. Kingly Way (Wangdao):** The distinction between the Way of the hegemon (*badao*) and the Kingly Way (*wangdao*) is foundational in Confucian political thought. *Badao* seeks order and predominance chiefly through military power, strategic calculation, and state advantage; *wangdao* grounds legitimate authority in virtue (*de*), humane government (*renzheng*), righteousness, and the ethical transformation of ruler and people. In Xunzi's institutional formulation, ritual (*li*) is a central means through which the Kingly Way creates and sustains that moral-political order.

2. **Tension in Mencius:** Mencius sharply opposes hegemonic rule (*badao*) to the Kingly Way (*wangdao*): because it relies on force and strategic advantage rather than humane virtue, *badao* cannot possess the full legitimacy of true kingship. Yet he recognizes its limited practical utility in a world of Warring States disorder, where a hegemon may restrain violence or secure a measure of peace. This produces a tension between Mencius's uncompromising normative ideal and his recognition that non-ideal political order may sometimes be less harmful than tyranny or anarchy. Xunzi later develops this opening into a more explicit account of morally decent hegemonic rule.
3. **Badao is not tyranny:** For Mencius, *badao* is not equivalent to tyranny. Although hegemonic rule remains normatively inferior to the Kingly Way because it relies primarily on power and strategic advantage, it may secure a degree of order, safety, and popular welfare under non-ideal conditions. Its value is therefore limited and comparative: hegemony can be less harmful than tyranny or anarchy, without attaining the full moral legitimacy of humane kingship (*wangdao*).
4. **Central question:** The central question is whether hegemonic rule (*badao*) can be governed by a distinctively Confucian moral standard. Can a ruler who falls short of the Kingly Way (*wangdao*) nevertheless establish a stable, comparatively just, and morally decent political order through trustworthiness, ritualized norms, restraint, and concern for social order?
5. **Xunzi's reinterpretation:** Xunzi agrees that the Kingly Way is the highest Confucian political ideal, but he rejects the view that hegemonic rule and tyranny are morally equivalent. A hegemon remains inferior to a true king, yet—when political power is restrained by trustworthiness, ritual norms, and concern for order—hegemony can constitute a morally decent form of non-ideal Confucian statecraft.
6. **Duke Guan as test case:** Duke Huan of Qi and Guan Zhong provide a test case for Xunzi's graded account of political virtue. Duke Huan was personally imperfect and initially hostile to Guan Zhong, who had served his rival and had even acted against him. Yet, on Bao Shuya's advice, Huan overcame personal resentment, recognized Guan Zhong's exceptional ability, and entrusted him with high office. Their subsequent success illustrates the distinction between comprehensive sage-like moral perfection and a more limited political virtue: a ruler may fall short of the Kingly Way while still showing the judgment, self-restraint, and receptivity to capable counsel needed to create a stable and comparatively beneficial hegemonic order.
7. **Moderation (Jie) as political virtue:** Moderation (jie 節) is a political virtue of measured self-command and practical judgment. It requires a ruler to understand the political situation, restrain private passions when they distort public judgment, assess persons and circumstances intelligently, and act in ways that sustain order and the public good. It is not emotional numbness or the mere suppression of feeling.
8. **Trust (Xin) as moral content:** For Xunzi, a hegemon's willingness to restrain private resentment and entrust capable former enemies with authority can generate *xin* 信—

public trustworthiness, credibility, and reliable political relations. This gives *badao* limited moral content: while it remains inferior to the Kingly Way, a hegemonic order can be morally decent when power is disciplined by self-restraint, trustworthiness, ritual norms, and concern for stable order. Xunzi's realism therefore differs from a purely amoral Legalist instrumentalism, even though he recognizes the importance of institutions, standards, and statecraft.

9. **Badao in domestic governance:** In Xunzi's non-ideal political theory, a properly constrained *badao* can provide the institutional and material foundations of decent social life: it can enable the appointment of capable officials, improve productive and economic conditions, protect basic livelihood and security, and maintain public order. These achievements do not equal the Kingly Way, because they do not by themselves effect comprehensive moral transformation. Yet they are indispensable preconditions for ritual practice, education, and the higher moral aims of Confucian politics.
10. **Badao in interstate relations:** In Xunzi's non-ideal theory of interstate order, a genuine hegemon does more than maximize state interest. By protecting weaker states, restoring endangered polities, restraining violent powers, and honoring commitments, the hegemon establishes *xin* 信—political trustworthiness and strategic credibility. This gives hegemonic leadership a genuine but limited moral dimension: it can create a stable, reciprocal, though hierarchical, international order short of the righteousness and moral transformation of the Kingly Way.
11. **Tempered virtue monism:** Xunzi's tempered virtue monism retains virtue as the highest standard of political evaluation but rejects the conclusion that all regimes falling short of the Kingly Way are morally equivalent. Hegemonic rule (*badao*) remains inferior to true kingship (*wangdao*), since it does not achieve comprehensive moral transformation; nevertheless, when disciplined by trustworthiness, ritual norms, competent administration, and concern for stable order, it can be morally preferable to tyranny, predation, or political disorder.
12. **Positive Confucianism:** Positive Confucianism holds that political philosophy must do more than criticize arbitrary or immoral rule. It must also explain how legitimate authority can actively create and sustain political order under difficult, non-ideal conditions—through virtuous leadership, capable institutions, ritual norms, education, material provision, and the cultivation of social trust.

Key relevance highlighted by Oleksandr:

- **Self-restraint as foundation of social order:** Civilized interaction begins with restraining personal impulses for the sake of relations with others.
- **Trust as basis of solidarity:** Political order depends on mutual trust and reliability even between former adversaries — solidarity does not require complete moral agreement.

- **Civility under non-ideal conditions:** The most important takeaway — a socially valuable order is possible even when people are not morally perfect; civility is a practice that makes common life possible under imperfection and conflict.
- **In other words:** Self-restraint is the first condition of civilized social and political life, as persons must be able to regulate anger, resentment, pride, and immediate self-interest in order to sustain relations with others. From such restraint arises trust—not necessarily complete moral agreement or intimacy, but the public confidence that people, including former adversaries, can act reliably, honor commitments, and place shared responsibilities above private hostility. The central lesson for politics under non-ideal conditions is therefore that a valuable social order does not await morally perfect citizens or rulers. Civility is a practical moral achievement: through measured conduct, trustworthy relations, and reciprocal restraint, it makes common life possible amid disagreement, imperfection, and conflict.

Discussion:

- Wang En invoked the Communist Party’s development of an independent army amid Nationalist repression and military threat as a modern illustration of non-ideal political necessity. The analogy highlights how movements facing existential danger may consolidate coercive power not merely from expansionist ambition but as a condition of survival. This resembles the realist background against which Confucian thinkers assessed hegemonic power, though it should not be treated as a direct historical instance of classical *badao*.
- En’s offered a non-ideal political argument: a ruler who rewards worthy conduct, punishes wrongdoing proportionately, appoints able persons, and maintains public order may exercise power in a morally constrained and socially beneficial way. In Kim’s Xunzian interpretation, this can give *badao* limited moral standing without raising it to the level of *wangdao*.
- Hu Yeping added that Mencius universalizes the moral potential formerly symbolized by the sage-kings. While the title “Son of Heaven” remained a unique royal office, Mencius holds that every person possesses the moral “sprouts” from which benevolence, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom may be cultivated. Sagehood is thus not the exclusive possession of rulers: any person can become morally great, even comparable to Yao and Shun. In this ethical—not modern democratic—sense, Mencius democratizes virtue.

Chapter 6 — Global Vision, Just War, and Confucian Constitutionalism (Presented by Dr. Ravi Vincent)

- **Core argument:** Kim traces how Mencius and Xunzi adapted Confucius’s universal moral vision to the fragmented, violent reality of the late Warring States period.

- **Two pillars of Confucian virtue politics:** Two central pillars of Confucian virtue politics are *de* 德 and *li* 禮. *De* is moral charisma, ethical efficacy, or virtue: a ruler's authority is normatively credible only when grounded in sustained self-cultivation and manifested in humane, righteous, and exemplary conduct. *Li* is ritual propriety and normative order: through shared, role-differentiated practices of conduct, education, and public ceremony, it forms dispositions, regulates relations, and enables the moral cultivation of the people. Together, they make political authority ethically legitimate and socially formative rather than merely coercive.
- **Wangdao vs. Badao in plain terms:** – Wangdao: “I rule because my virtue, humane government, and righteous conduct lead people to recognize my authority and follow willingly.” – Badao: “I rule because I possess sufficient power, resources, and strategic capacity to lead and secure compliance—though I must still be credible and reliable if my rule is to endure.”
- **Duke Wen of Teng:** Duke Wen of Teng exemplifies the predicament of a small state under hegemonic pressure. Teng stood between the stronger powers of Qi and Chu, and Duke Wen asked Mencius whether survival required submission to one or the other. The exchange dramatizes the tension between the Kingly Way's aspiration to humane and morally legitimate rule and the strategic constraints of interstate insecurity. Mencius offers no simple alliance formula; instead, he argues that good government can create an internal source of security by winning the people's loyalty and making the state worth defending.
- **Taiwang precedent:** The precedent of King Tai of Zhou (Taiwang) illustrates the limits of appeasement under hegemonic pressure. Faced with escalating demands, Taiwang initially surrendered material goods—traditionally, furs and silk, and later dogs and horses—because such possessions were not worth endangering the people in war. When the aggressors demanded land, however, the issue ceased to be a negotiable loss of goods and became a threat to the political community. Taiwang neither continued unlimited concession nor sacrificed his people in a futile defense of his own position; he led them away to a new settlement. Ravi's proceeded to a comparison with contemporary geopolitics which is to be understood as a warning about escalating coercive demands, while preserving the story's deeper Mencian lesson: indeed, a ruler must always distinguish prudent compromise from the betrayal of the people's security and political existence.
- **Just war (Zhengfa / Juzhan Beilü):** In “Discussion of Military Affairs” (Yibing 議兵), Xunzi develops rules for a righteous punitive expedition (zhu 誅) that resemble constraints of just-war theory. A true king punishes those responsible for disorder but does not wage war against a population: he does not massacre city dwellers, kill the old or young, destroy crops, seize or imprison those who surrender, pursue those who flee, or rely on covert military movement and deception. He also avoids attacking strongly defended cities or determined resisting forces and does not keep troops

deployed for prolonged campaigns. These restrictions aim to restore order while protecting noncombatants and the material basis of common life.

- **Non-causal responsibility:** Mencius develops a conception of non-causal political responsibility: rulers are not necessarily the causes of famine, flood, or failed harvests, but they remain answerable for the avoidable suffering such disasters produce. In Mencius 1A.3, he rejects King Hui's attempt to blame deaths on a bad harvest, comparing it to a killer who blames the weapon rather than himself. The ruler's office entails duties of foresight, provision, relief, and equitable distribution; natural misfortune therefore cannot excuse a failure to protect the people's basic welfare.
- **Confucian constitutionalism (synthesis):** Kim's central contribution is to show that classical Confucian political thought is neither a merely interpersonal ethics nor an amoral doctrine of statecraft. He reconstructs Mencius and Xunzi as theorists of a sophisticated form of Confucian constitutionalism: a virtue-centered political order in which state power is both enabled and constrained by moral authority, ritual norms, remonstrance, role-differentiated institutions, and responsibility for the people's welfare. Mencius emphasizes the negative task of checking arbitrary rule; Xunzi emphasizes the positive task of building institutional, economic, and ritual conditions under which stable order and moral cultivation can flourish.

Key Philosophical Synthesis

- **Kim's integration:** Kim reads Mencius and Xunzi as developing convergent, though differently accented, forms of Confucian constitutionalism. Mencius's virtue-centered and predominantly negative Confucianism makes political authority morally conditional: rulers must be constrained by *ren*, *yi*, remonstrance, and responsibility for the people. Xunzi's ritual- and institution-centered, predominantly positive Confucianism explains how power, once so constrained, can be organized through *li*, education, offices, and civic norms to create stable public order. The synthesis is that virtue must have constitutional force, while political institutions must embody, protect, and cultivate virtue.
- **Nietzsche's role in Kim:** João suggested that Kim's Nietzschean interpretation functions as a productive counterpoint for recovering Confucianism's political relevance. Kim does not identify the Mencian moral hero with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*; rather, Nietzsche's language of self-overcoming and transvaluation helps illuminate how Mencius contests the prevailing values of Warring States *realpolitik*. Mencius's moral hero resists the authority of wealth, force, rank, and strategic success, but does so not by creating values *ex nihilo*. He does so by cultivating and publicly defending *ren* and *yi*, thereby turning moral independence into a basis for remonstrance, resistance to tyranny, and a distinctively Confucian form of political liberty.
- **Nietzsche's historical danger:** João noted the politically dangerous afterlife of Nietzsche's philosophy. During the First World War, special field editions of *Thus Spoke*

Zarathustra were distributed to German soldiers, helping make Nietzsche a cultural emblem of heroic endurance and national struggle; in the following decades, German nationalist and fascist movements selectively appropriated his name and writings, and the Nazi regime publicly presented him as a precursor. This history does not make Nietzsche simply an imperialist or fascist thinker—his work also contains powerful critiques of German nationalism and antisemitism—but it demonstrates how philosophical concepts can be detached from their original context, ideologically repurposed, and made politically consequential.

- **Monism vs. Dualism:** Mohan raised the question about the intriguing conceptual affinities existing between Spinoza's immanent monism and certain Confucian, especially Neo-Confucian, accounts of an internally ordered cosmos. According to João, however, there are not, at least not yet, demonstrated direct lines of influence from Confucian ethics to Spinoza's metaphysical monism. There are, however, stronger evidences regarding European debates that compared Chinese thought with Spinozism. Above all, there are much stronger evidences regarding Leibniz's documented engagement with Jesuit accounts of Neo-Confucianism. The question raised by Mohan, therefore, however constituting a promising problem in comparative intellectual history, is something that at present should be framed as a hypothesis requiring strong archival and textual evidence rather than as a scholarly conclusion.
- **João considers** (a posteriori) that from the late sixteenth century onward, Jesuit missionaries in China—especially Matteo Ricci, Michele Ruggieri, Prospero Intorcetta, Philippe Couplet, and others—served as crucial mediators through whom Confucian and Neo-Confucian ideas entered European intellectual life. Seeking dialogue with the Chinese literati and pursuing an accommodationist missionary strategy, they learned classical Chinese, translated and paraphrased canonical texts, and interpreted Confucian moral teaching as a rational ethical tradition broadly compatible with Christianity. Their landmark publication, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (Paris, 1687), presented Latin versions of three of the Four Books—the *Great Learning*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, and *Analects*—and gave European readers their first systematic access to Confucian philosophy. Naturally, this was not a neutral transmission as Jesuit interpretations of Confucian texts were often filtered through Christian and scholastic categories, rendering, for example, *ren* as *pietas* or charity, *yi* as justice, *xin* as fidelity, and *li* as civility. Furthermore, at times the Jesuits conflated the ancient Confucian classics with Song–Ming Neo-Confucian interpretations, especially Zhu Xi's. The result was a productive but selective European image of China as a civilization of rational morality and disciplined public order—an image that subsequently shaped debates among figures such as Pierre Bayle and Leibniz concerning natural religion, atheism, ethics, metaphysics, and political order.
- **Ritual in Confucianism:** Hu Yeping emphasized that Confucian li 禮 is not reducible to religious sacrifice. Although the term originally referred to sacrificial and court rites, Confucian thinkers expanded it into a comprehensive norm of ritual propriety governing conduct across human life: court audiences, diplomatic exchanges, funerals,

ancestor rites, marriage, seasonal and harvest ceremonies, family relations, and the ordinary courtesies of everyday interaction. Li is therefore both a virtue and a social grammar: it gives form to respect, grief, gratitude, deference, authority, and mutual responsibility, making civilized and morally ordered common life possible.

- **African parallel:** Maduabuchi Dukor proposed an African comparative parallel: in many indigenous African religious and political traditions, ritual orders social relations, communicates shared values, mediates conflict, repairs damaged relationships, and may seek reconciliation with ancestors, deities, or spiritual powers. In these functional respects, such practices can be compared with Confucian ritual constitutionalism, in which li 禮 structures authority, cultivates moral dispositions, regulates conduct, and sustains social cohesion. But it is important to note that such a comparison should not collapse the two traditions into an equivalence: African ritual practices often place explicit relations with ancestral and spiritual agencies at the center of social repair, whereas Confucian li is primarily articulated as a human, ethical, and role-governed practice of propriety—though it also includes sacrificial and ancestral rites.

AI as Urgent Agenda Item

- Franklin flagged that AI has reached a level causing panic among leaders, enterprises, and even AI company founders (Anthropic, OpenAI), who acknowledge things are “going too fast and perhaps running out of control.”
- He proposed preparing a dedicated presentation on AI for Friday’s final session of this seminar segment.
- João agreed, noting that AI’s exponential developments and their political, social, economic, psychological, and spiritual implications are “truly in the order of the day.”
- Adrienne connected AI to the broader theme of the self and state: citizens have already immersed themselves in AI tools without waiting for state guidance, yet now look to the state to define truth — a reversal of the individual-state trust relationship.

Action Items & Next Steps

- **Franklin:** Prepare a focused presentation on AI (political, social, spiritual implications) for Friday’s session.
- **Dian:** Present the Introduction of Vardulakis’s [*The Agonistic Condition: Materialism and Democracy*](#) (2025) on Wednesday (pp. 1-54).
- **Lidia:** Present Chapter 1 of Vardulakis on Wednesday (pp. 55-103).
- **Nubong:** Present Chapter 2 of Vardulakis on Wednesday (104-152).

- **Franklin:** Deliver postponed presentation on Kim's "All Under Heaven" concept at the start of Wednesday's session.
- **João:** Share link to Kim's [Confucian Constitutionalism](#) (2023) in the seminar folder for Shiva's PhD research.
- **João:** Offer a clarifying discussion on **monism vs. dualism** (Confucian ethics and Spinoza) at the start of Wednesday's session, per Dr. John Mohan's request. Cf. the clarification here above.
- **Adrienne:** Publish Session 12 report — no objections were raised to its content.
- **All participants:** Read at minimum the Introduction and Chapter 1 (ideally also Chapter 2) of Vardoulakis before Wednesday.

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