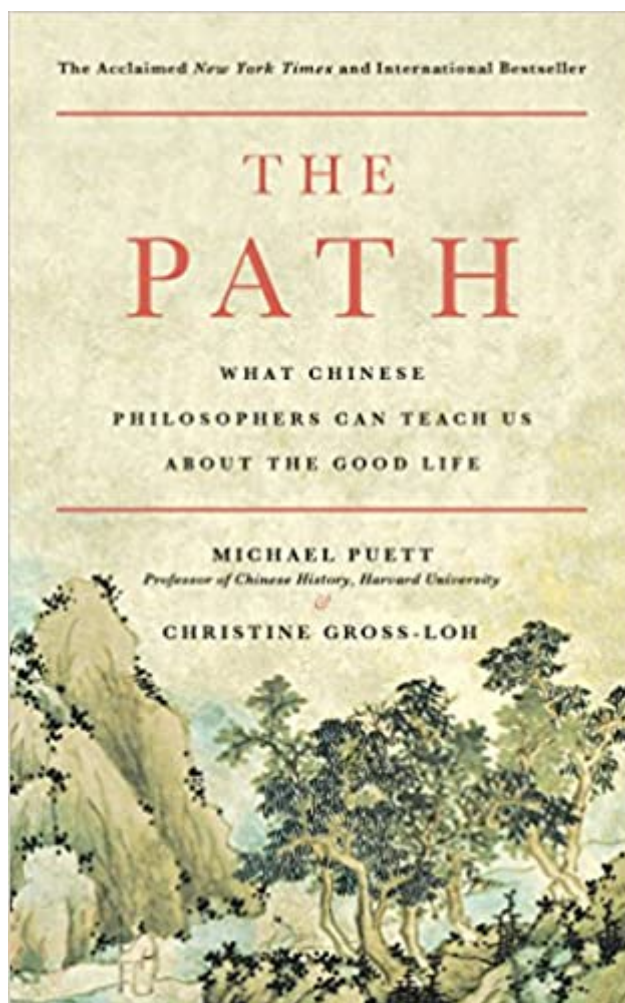


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# The Path: What Chinese Philosophers Can Teach Us About The Good Life



## Synopsis

For the first time, an award-winning Harvard professor shares his wildly popular course on classical Chinese philosophy, showing you how ancient ideas—like the fallacy of the authentic self—can guide you on the path to a good life today. Why is a course on ancient Chinese philosophers one of the most popular at Harvard? Because it challenges all our modern assumptions about what it takes to flourish. Astonishing teachings emerged two thousand years ago through the work of a succession of Chinese scholars exploring how humans can improve themselves and their society. And what are these counterintuitive ideas? Transformation comes not from looking within for a true self, but from creating conditions that produce new possibilities. Good relationships come not from being sincere and authentic, but from the rituals we perform within them. A good life emerges not from planning it out, but through training ourselves to respond well to small moments. Influence comes not from wielding power but from holding back. Excellence comes from what we choose to do, not our natural abilities. In other words, *The Path* “opens the mind” (Huffington Post) and upends everything we are told about how to lead a good life. Its most radical idea is that there is no path to follow in the first place—just a journey we create anew at every moment by seeing and doing things differently. “With its spirited, convincing vision, revolutionary new insights can be gleaned from this book on how to approach life’s multifarious situations with both heart and head” (Kirkus Reviews). A note from the publisher: To read relevant passages from the original works of Chinese philosophy, see our ebook *Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Xunzi: Selected Passages*, available wherever books are sold.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**\*\*New York Times and International Bestseller\*\*** “I read *The Path* in one sitting and have been talking about it to everyone. It’s brilliant, mesmerizing, profound and deeply contrarian. It stands conventional wisdom on its head and points the way to a life of genuine fulfillment and meaning.” (Amy Chua, Yale Law professor and author of *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* and *The Triple Package*) “A remarkable combination of self-help guide and iconoclastic take on ancient Chinese wisdom... The authors superbly succeed at highlighting ancient Chinese philosophy’s tools for achieving its vision of a flourishing life... Confucius famously declared in the *Analects*, ‘I transmit, but do not innovate.’ Puett and Gross-Loh deftly do both.” (The Chronicle of Higher Education) “This is a book that turns the notion of help and the self, for that matter, on its head. Puett and Gross-Loh bring seemingly esoteric concepts down to Earth, where we can see them more clearly. The result is a philosophy book grounded in the here and now, and brimming with nuggets of insight. No fortune-cookie this, *The Path* serves up a buffet of meaty life lessons. I found myself reading and re-reading sections, letting the wisdom steep like a good cup of tea.” (Eric Weiner, author of *The Geography of Bliss* and *The Geography of Genius*) “Puett’s dynamism translates well from his classroom theater onto the page, and his provocative, radical re-envisioning of everyday living through Chinese philosophy opens wide the ‘possibilities for thinking afresh about ourselves and about our future.’ His text presents creative alternatives to the stale ‘confines of our narrative.’ With philosophical consideration, our methods of interacting and coexisting may, as the author promises, have the power to better our lives and our relationships. With its . . . spirited, convincing vision, revolutionary new insights can be gleaned from this book on how to approach life’s multifarious situations with both heart and head.” (Kirkus Reviews) “This book is a revelation, a practical way through a fractured, distracting world. I thought I knew these philosophers and I was wrong. Rigorous, concise, deeply informed, *The Path* retires our facile shorthand about ideas from the East and presents a powerful intellectual case to engage, to care, and to remember.” (Evan Osnos, National Book Award-winning author of *Age of Ambition*) “Offers interesting alternatives to some of our modern ideas of self and society . . . worth the cover price.” (Financial Times (UK)) “*The Path* will not only change your life--it will change the way you see history and the world. From its wondrously fresh take on Confucius to its quietly profound read of just what it is the great sages have to say to us, this book exemplifies all that can

come of the radical openness of Chinese philosophy. Read it and be transformed." (Gish Jen, author of *Tiger Writing* and *The Love Wife*) "If you're looking to get out of a rut, or rise above the doom and gloom of our present global situation, Puett's channeled knowledge from the Chinese masters will be a wake-up call. We sometimes forget that our problems are as old as civilization, and maybe the answers have always been hidden in plain sight." (Publishers Weekly (Staff Pick)) "This book opens the mind. . . . These thoughts echo in my life, even if the origins were unknown to me. . . . Puett and his co-author have performed a service for all of us. They have succeeded in their project. Their accessible, conversational style introduces anyone with interest to what Chinese sages suggested about giving meaning to our days. Even more impressive, they inspire interest." (Frank Wu, *The Huffington Post*) "A very accessible and inspiring piece of work. . . . Anyone willing to put the work in might find that this book really can change your life." (The Sentinel (UK)) "The book is full of ancient wisdom and insights that can help you rethink the choices you make every day so that they lead to greater happiness and fulfillment." (Business Insider) "The Path illuminates a little-known spiritual and intellectual landscape: the rich body of Chinese thought that, starting more than two millennia ago, charted new approaches to living a meaningful life. But Puett goes a lot further, creatively applying this ancient thought to the dilemmas of modern life. The result is a fresh recipe for harnessing our natural energies and emotions to strengthen social connection and build islands of order amid the chaos that sometimes surrounds us." (Robert Wright, author of *The Language of God*) "Puett's book encourages us to chuck away our stiff, encrusted western notions, and to adopt a more fluid, less didactic approach to life. The Path is not your classic self-help book, and not just because it dismantles the self. It doesn't serve up an easy set of how-to activities. . . . You are also advised that any changes you make will be slow, incremental, the result of constant daily work. . . . To talk to Puett is to view our western tradition through an entirely different lens." (The Sunday Times (UK)) "Offers a contrarian view to pop psychology... [and] cultivates a meaningful life. The teachings in *The Path* offer ways to work with what you have." (Chicago Tribune) "The Path looks at the teachings of ancient Chinese philosophers and explains how we can apply these largely forgotten teachings to our everyday lives. Granted, it sounds like a tough read. It sounds specialist and niche and intimidating. It sounds all of those things. But it is none of those things. It's a big ask in under 200 pages. But there's something wonderfully simple and refreshing about the ideas. There is a simplicity to this book: all we have is ourselves, let's try and make things better." (Marisa Bate, *The Pool* (UK)) "Puett's course has become the most popular on campus, even with those studying other subjects, and that's because he talks about how to have a good life. Using ancient Chinese

philosophy challenges all our modern assumptions about what it takes to flourish in life." (Sarah Montague, Today programme (UK))"This beautifully written book is a must-read. . . . The Path has tremendous riches to offer young people (and not so young people) precisely because it begins with a challenge to Western notions of the Self. . . . This slender little book carried a very big punch." (Scattering Blossoms, Fallen Leaves (blog))"The Path is, in a word, brilliant! I would encourage everyone to get a copy of this book! Great discussion will come from reading it, and you may find yourself looking to delve deeper into some of the writings of these wise teachers from the past. The Path will be joining a select group of books on my shelf which I reread every year." (Book Tardis (blog))"Odd and interesting, brightly accessible.... The book seems deeply knowing and is certainly respectful of this ancient wisdom." (Shawangunk Journal and Sullivan County Democrat)"[The Path is] 1) a disrupting challenge to almost any rigid worldview and 2) a brief overview of Chinese philosophy. . . . The authors repeatedly point out that these philosophies are not just abstract 'big question' type approaches; they are intended for use and exploration thru the daily nitty-gritty of real life. . . . Though in some cases, you'll have to go deeper into these 'paths' to figure out how, this book is a good place to start." (Dwarf + Giant (blog))

Michael Puett is the Walter C. Klein Professor of Chinese History in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations and Chair of the Committee on the Study of Religion at Harvard University. He is the recipient of a Harvard College Professorship for excellence in undergraduate teaching and is a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Science. Christine Gross-Loh is a journalist and author. Her writing has appeared in publications including The Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic, and The Guardian. She has a PhD from Harvard University in East Asian history.

I have long thought behaviour was contextual. Here it is. Create your context with propriety, seek alternative paths to solutions, do not take things too seriously as failure and life's whims are to be expected. In fact this book is quite effective and any undergraduate paying for an education would be advised to get some brain food here. I have just finished two weeks in Thailand and the book went down well in quiet periods and I could experience how Buddhism is practiced. We live in a high conflict aggressive society in the west and there are few signs of any change. You may be advised to follow some of the wisdom here and develop yourself through the small rituals. On reflection I feel the book suggests we "manage our daily interactions through careful reflection of our actions and how they impact on others". This book is a very good start to a new way of being but the

supplementary text, free by download, is not quite on the level of the main text but a nice addition. Purchase without regret. Enjoy.

I hate self help books and their ilk. Somehow, this book appealed to me. I'm glad I got it. It reminds me in some ways of *Dancing With Life: Buddhist Insights for Finding Meaning and Joy in the Face of Suffering*. The advice is very realistic, very practical, and very helpful. You can read this and instantly apply it to your day to day life and see improvement from the changes that you've made. Just an excellent book, with excellent advice that doesn't feel fake ("Work hard and miracles can happen!" or "Visualize what you want and it will come to you!" or "This is what rich people do, if you do it, you can be rich too!") Mostly it's about improving small things in your day to day life, and over time seeing big changes and improvements. But that is such a generalization on my part. Read the book, you won't regret it!

Great commentary. The author's approach is indirect but foundationally transforming. Much like the intimate yet non-doing discussed. This is an essential companion to Tao Te Ching.

Some really helpful deductions but much of it too convoluted while often tending towards redundancy.

Excellent book that provides a refreshing perspective on how to look at life.

This is one of the books which talk about philosophy of spiritual growth a continuous process which never ends unless you understand that there is no end.

Clear, concise, careful explanation - thought provoking and inspiring

Old wine in new a new bottle. The author's talk on YouTube was more interesting than his book.

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