Writing Assignments

Essay One (Due 6/5):
Choose one of the readings from the first week of class (Mencius, Hsun Tzu, Hobbes) and use it as a basis for an analysis of the usefulness of the terms “good” and “evil” when discussing human nature. You will want to explain how the writer uses these terms (or their equivalents), and how his use (or misuse, or disuse) of those terms shapes the ideas he is presenting. The specific shape of your argument will be determined by the work you choose to address, but in any case you will want to make sure that you use specific examples to illustrate your points, and you will want to make sure you avoid the trap of merely summarizing the work.

Essay Two (Due 6/12):
Taking as your point of departure at least one of the writers from the second week of class, articulate a way to understand the relationship between “law” and “justice,” and how that relationship makes a difference in the world of practical politics. Are the two coterminous, or are there significant differences between them? Does one depend on the other, for instance? When you think about these issues, feel free to use more than one writer, and to provide some comparisons between their ideas. You want to provide specific evidence in your discussion, and you want to be quite specific in how you define the terms you use.

Essay Three (Due 6/19):
Write an essay in which you articulate a coherent theoretical basis for secondary and higher education. In your essay, write from as objective and impersonal (i.e., “researched”) a position as you can manage; your aim is to think about education in the broad sense, using a set of ideas drawn from several writers, rather than as merely a personal experience. You will also need to think about the difference between older philosophical positions and the current shape of institutional education.

Essay Four (Due 6/26):
This is your chance to write a critical personal narrative; using the multiple perspectives on education that you’ve read, provide a critical account of your own educational experience. You will want to examine your experience not simply in itself, but in reference to larger ideas about what education should be and what it should do. You will want to make specific references to the readings you find most fitting, careful not to make sloppy or irrelevant comparisons. This narrative will be evaluated on its clarity and its care in balancing personal experience and careful (i.e., objective) observation.