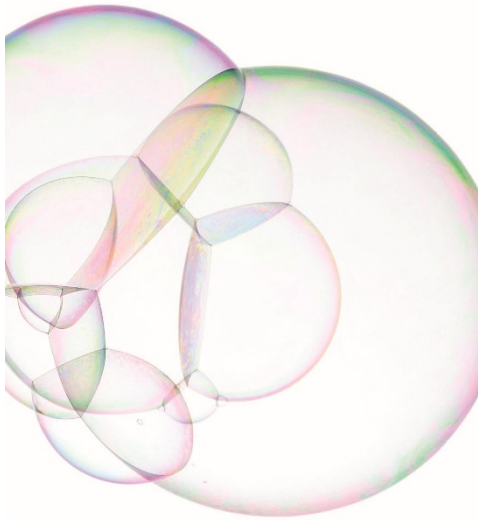




EARLY CHINA SEMINAR LECTURE SERIES

All Things Act: The Collective Character of Action

Mercedes Valmisa · Gettysburg College



ALL THINGS ACT

MERCEDES VALMISA

This lecture reflects on how my study of early Chinese texts and material culture led me to develop the metaphysics of agency presented in *All Things Act*. Rather than approaching early Chinese thought primarily as an object of historical reconstruction, I treat it as a partner in contemporary philosophical inquiry: a source of concepts, arguments, and models that can transform the questions we ask about action and agency. *All Things Act* (OUP, 2025) reconceives action as something that is never performed by an individual alone. Actions emerge through relations among heterogeneous human and nonhuman actors, while agency names the distributed sociomaterial processes through which they become possible. This metaphysics does not simply extract a theory already contained in early Chinese sources. It develops through a dialogue between early Chinese texts and material culture and contemporary work in philosophy of action, metaphysics, and social ontology, with each reshaping how the other can be understood. As one example of this method, I show how the *Xing zi ming chu* and the *Mengzi*, read alongside contemporary theories of powers and dispositions, suggest an ecological conception of what things can do: powers emerge through contingent encounters between particular features and particular environments. I conclude by considering some consequences of this relational and ecological model, particularly for thinking about ability and disability and, if time permits, attribution and responsibility.

January 29th, 2027, 4:30–6:30 pm EST

Faculty House, 64 Morningside Drive, Columbia University and online via Zoom

*Please check the announcement board in the first-floor lobby for room information

Seminar Co-Chairs:

Glenda Chao, Ursinus College

Ethan Harkness, New York University

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