

THE UH MĀNOA DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY PRESENTS

The Eliot Deutsch Merit Award Presentation for Best PhD Proposal Defense

The First Political Question: Value Disagreement and the Problem of Collective Action in Early China by Bobby McCullough

This dissertation explores what I term “the problem of collective action” in the early Chinese political and philosophical context. The problem of collective action can be understood as a tension between value disagreement and the grounds for collective action among members of a political community. Specifically, I construct interpretations of the *Xunzi*, the *Han Feizi*, and the *Huainanzi* that acknowledge and provide solutions to the problem of collective action. Briefly, the *Xunzi* emphasizes a top-down collapsing of public and private values into a system of value monism; the *Han Feizi* strictly delineates the separation of public and private values and recommends a top-down extirpation of private values from the public domain; the *Huainanzi* advocates for a hands-off bottom-up approach that leaves communities to run largely autonomously. The project concludes with an evaluation of these solutions to the problem of collective action and reflections on how we might bring these insights to bear on modern-day political issues.



**Bobby McCullough
2025 Award Recipient**

Date & Time:

Friday, April 25, 2025 | 2:30 pm

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