

PH3218 Introduction to Comparative Philosophy (AY2023/2024 Sem 2)

Syllabus Document

Course Description:

This module, designed for students with some philosophical training in both western and non-western philosophy, introduces students to comparative philosophy, which brings together traditions of philosophy that have developed in relative isolation from one another for the purpose of comparing how different cultures have approached and thematized major philosophical issues. It aims to elucidate the assumptions implicit in different ways of thinking about these issues and investigate how issues may be related in the light of these assumptions.

Instructor:

Instructor: Daryl Ooi

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Office hours: By appointment

Module Expectations and Policies:

- **Late submissions:** late submissions (without a reasonable explanation) will be penalised – one mark per day. If you require an extension of deadline, please ask for this early, granting extension will be subject to approval based on the instructor's work schedule and reason provided.
- **Expectations for Discussions:** students are expected to participate and contribute to all discussions in class. In order to ensure that our discussions are constructive, charitable and collegial, as far as is reasonable, do adhere to the following discussion norms:
 - Allow the speaker to finish their thought/reasoning instead of interrupting.
 - Good practices (but not necessary):
 - If a speaker has just presented, thank the speaker for their presentation before asking a question/raising your point.
 - Before you raise your point/question, identify which part of the speaker's presentation you're aiming to address: (E.g., 'you mentioned that... I wanted to clarify...')

- If you're raising an objection, (if possible) articulate and acknowledge what is valuable about the speaker's point, (try your best to) argue against the best possible version of the speaker's point instead of a strawman, (consider) clarify before objecting [I've learnt that *sometimes*, if a view seems *obviously* wrong to me, I may have misunderstood what the speaker said/meant], suggest an alternative solution (if you have one), and once the speaker addresses your question, thank the speaker.
 - Always pay attention to the sometimes less visible dynamics of interaction: body language (yours and others), tone (yours and others), phrases, 'hidden' power dynamics and vulnerabilities, potential discomforts and anxieties (yours and others) etc. Remember: we're here to learn together and to support each other.
 - Feel free to take a break, or call for a break, if needed.
 - Some suggestions **for those less used to participating**: ask a clarification question, ask the speaker to repeat/clarify what they said, suggest an important potentially overlooked distinction, suggest alternative solutions, raise a counter-example, ask an extension question (e.g., what implications might this insight have for ...?), raise an objection, make a comment etc.
 - If the speaker is super enthusiastic and there are **no 'breaks'** in their obviously brilliant sharing, raise four consecutive fingers and a thumb to ask a question or make a comment, and raise one finger if your question/comment is especially related to the current discussion (queue priority).
- **Student Help:** National University of Singapore provides access to counselling services for students who would like it:

<http://www.nus.edu.sg/uhc/resources/articles/details/counselling-psychological-services>

Note on use of generative AIs:

- University Guidelines: <https://libguides.nus.edu.sg/new2nus/acadintegrity>
- **If you use a generative AI** for your work, it needs to be cited (else, it will be considered plagiarism). Additionally, note that generative AIs should not be (at least currently) treated as subject matter experts. Instead, please cite the *original source* in which the information/argument produced by the generative AI is found (as some generative AIs

generate false references, please double check this). Once you submit a work, it is *your* voice, *your* work, and *your* responsibility. Even if a generative AI gave you misinformation, once you reproduce it as your work, it is *your* work.

- Personally, I have **four principles** that guide my own thoughts on the use of generative AIs for this course:
 - I am not personally opposed to the use of generative AI. In fact, I'm very happy for you to use it (and learn to use it well). But it should support and complement, rather than replace, the skills that you should be developing.
 - There are various kinds of readings, each of which have different goals. Some are primarily informational – they want you to understand certain propositions (the author wants you to form justified true beliefs*). Others have certain perlocutionary aims – they want the readings to *do* something to the readers (the author wants to do things with words). As you will see, many of the readings assigned in this course (especially primary sources) involve both aims. Thus, if you treat the readings as *merely* informational, you're missing something that the authors thought to be important.
 - Learning to read well (as opposed to merely getting summaries from generative AIs) is an important skill: to be a good philosopher and in many potential vocations. You should therefore do the hard work and learn to read well. Ask for help when you require it – there's never any shame in that.
 - Finally, I've personally tested various generative AIs for my own research. The results are, at best, mixed. They are more useful for certain tasks and less useful for others. So *why* and *how* you use them are more important than *whether* you use them. Feel free to chat with me more about this if you're interested – if you've tested it, I'm happy to hear about ways that it is more or less effective.

Schedule and Readings:

Weeks 1 and 2: Introduction to Comparative Philosophy

Weeks 3 and 4: Problems of Comparative Philosophy

Weeks 5 and 6: Approaches to Comparison

Recess Week

Week 7: Workshop on 'Writing Comparative Philosophy'

Weeks 8 to 12: Comparing Concepts across Traditions (this sem, we will focus on epistemology, philosophy of religion, and moral psychology. Of course, if students have strong interests in specific concepts beyond these topics, we can make time to explore them)

Week 13: Concluding Remarks and the Future of Comparative Philosophy

Part I: Methodological Issues	
<u>Introduction to Comparative Philosophy</u>	
W 1	<u>Is there Philosophy outside of the 'West'? Or, are all philosophical traditions equal?</u> Required Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bryan Van Norden (2017), <i>Taking Back Philosophy</i>. Read pages 1-18. Supplementary Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bryan Van Norden (2017), <i>Taking Back Philosophy</i>. Preface and Chapter 1.• Bryan Van Norden (2017), "Western Philosophy is Racist," Aeon: https://aeon.co/essays/why-the-western-philosophical-canon-is-xenophobic-and-racist• Peter Park (2015), "Introduction to Africa, Asia and the History of Philosophy."
W 2	<u>What is Comparative Philosophy? Or, [Comparative/ Fusion/ World/ Multicultural] + [Philosophy/ History/ Tradition]</u> Required Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• David Wong (2003, 2013) – <i>Comparative Philosophy</i> Supplementary Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Loy Hui-Chieh (2023) – <i>Philosophy and History, Custom and Ethics (Section I)</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephen Angle (2010) - The minimal definition and methodology of comparative philosophy • Ralph Weber (2013) - How to Compare - On the Methodological State of Comparative Philosophy • Tim Connolly – Methods of Comparative Philosophy: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_nyVxg5dbA&pp=ygUjdGltIGNvbm5vbGx5IGNvbXBhcmF0aXZlIHBoaWxvc29waHk%3D
<u>Problems of Comparative Philosophy</u>	
W 3	<u>Linguistic Incommensurability</u> Required Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donald Davidson (1973-1974) - On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme Supplementary Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lera Boroditsky (2001) - Does Language Shape Thought • Erin Cline (2017) - Comparisons with Western Philosophy
W 4	<u>Incommensurability, Imposition and Insensitivity</u> Required Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Wong (on SEP) – Comparative Philosophy (Read Section 1. Section 2 and 3 encouraged by optional). https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/comparphil-chives/ Supplementary Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daya Krishna (2011) - Comparative Philosophy • Christoph Harbsmeier (1993) - Conceptions of Knowledge in Ancient China
<u>Approaches to Comparative Philosophy</u>	
W 5	<u>Bridges, Metaphors, Experiences, Experiments and Abandonment</u> Required Reading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eric Schwitzgebel (2007) - Human Nature and Moral Education in Mencius, Xunzi, Hobbes, and Rousseau Supplementary Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eric Schwitzgebel (2022) - Does the Heart Revolt at Evil? • Hannah Kim (2020) - Teaching Asian Texts through Bridge Concepts. https://blog.apaonline.org/2020/05/20/teaching-asian-texts-through-bridge-concepts/ • Hagop Sarkissian (2018) - Neo-Confucianism, experimental philosophy and the trouble with intuitive methods • Edward Slingerland (2004) - Conceptions of the Self in the Zhuangzi - Conceptual Metaphor Analysis and Comparative Thought • Bo Mou (2022) - Comparative Philosophy as a General Way of Doing Philosophy Through Cross-Tradition Engagement Toward World Philosophy • Saranindranath Tagore (2017) - On the Concept of World Philosophy

W 6	<p><u>On the Pluralistic End of the Spectrum...</u></p> <p>Required Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frank Saunders Jr. (2022) - Truth and Chinese Philosophy - A Plea for Pluralism <p>Supplementary Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steven Burik (2022) - Comparative Philosophy without Method: A Plea for Minimal Constraints [Unavailable at the moment] • Philip J. Ivanhoe (2012) - Understanding Traditional Chinese Philosophical Texts
Part II: Topical Comparisons	
W 7	<p><u>Workshop on 'Writing Comparative Philosophy'</u></p>
W 8	<p><u>Scepticism</u></p> <p>Primary Readings (required):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zhuangzi, Selections • Descartes, Selections <p>Secondary Readings (optional):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Kjellberg (2007) - Dao and Scepticism • Eric Schwitzgebel (2006) - Zhuangzi's Attitude Towards Language and His Scepticism
W 9	<p><u>Ineffability and the Problem of Evil</u></p> <p>Primary Readings (required):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ineffability in Chinese Philosophy, Selections • Job, Selections <p>Secondary Readings (optional):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Philip J. Ivanhoe (1993) - Zhuangzi on Skepticism, Skill and the Ineffable <i>Dao</i> • Chien-hsing Ho (2015) - Resolving the Ineffability Paradox • William Alston (1956) – Ineffability • Collections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Timothy Knepper and Leah Kalmanson (2017) - <i>Ineffability: An Exercise in Comparative Philosophy of Religion</i>: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64165-2 ○ Laura Weed (2023), <i>Mysticism, Ineffability and Silence in Philosophy of Religion</i>: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-18013-2
W 10	No Class (Good Friday)
W 11	<p><u>Care Ethics</u></p> <p>Required Reading (required):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virginia Held (2005) - The Ethics of Care as Moral Theory • Care Ethics in Chinese Philosophy, Selections

	<p>Secondary Resources (optional):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Li Chenyang (2016) - Care and Justice - Reading Mencius, Kant, and Gilligan Comparatively • Kelley Epley (2015) - Care Ethics and Confucianism • Carol Gilligan (1982) - In a different voice <p>Nel Noddings (1984) - Caring</p>
W 12	<p><u>Forgiveness</u></p> <p>Primary Readings (required):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgiveness in Chinese Philosophy, Selections • Joseph Butler, Selections <p>Secondary Readings (optional):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ernesto V. Garcia (2011) - Bishop Butler on Forgiveness and Resentment • Kwong-loi Shun (2014) - Resentment and Forgiveness in Confucian Thought • Christoph Harbsmeier (2011) - Forgiveness and Forbearance in Ancient China
W 13	<p><u>Concluding Remarks and the Future of Comparative Philosophy</u></p>