

PH4213, PH4213HM, PH5510 Comparative Philosophy (AY2023/2024 Sem 1)

Syllabus Document

Course Description:

This module identifies and compares the philosophical traditions generally labelled Eastern and Western. Aspects of comparative analysis include philosophical reasoning, linguistic style, logic of arguments, and substantive content. Comparison between traditions is cross-cultural and can result in dialogues across boundaries of space and time, and can also provide a forum to demonstrate the universality of human thought. Possible topics include, for example, Wittgenstein and Daoist philosophy, Nietzsche and Buddhism.

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:

Part 1: Issues in Comparative Philosophy	
Week 1	<p><u>Introduction: Comparative Philosophy and Philosophical 'Traditions'</u></p> <p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bryan Van Norden (2017), <i>Taking Back Philosophy</i>, Columbia Press. Read the 'Foreword' by Jay Garfield and Chapter 1. Download from NUS Library.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robert Solomon (2003), “Philosophy through Thick and Thin.” Download from NUS Library. <p>Additional Recommended Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Park (2015), “Introduction to Africa, Asia and the History of Philosophy.” <p>Supplementary Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Introduction to issues in Indigenous Philosophy): Krushil Watene (2018), “Reimagining the Human-Environment Relationship.” Download here; also: Matthias Kramm (2020), “When a River becomes a Person.” Download here. • (Response to Van Norden’s <i>Taking Back Philosophy</i>): Book Symposium. View here. • Helen De Cruz (2018), “Prestige Bias: an Obstacle to a Just Academic Philosophy.” Download here. <p>Interesting Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Philosophy Syllabus for Diversity): Diversity and Inclusiveness Syllabus, <i>APA</i>. View here. • (Interviews with Philosophers): What is it like to be a Philosopher? View here.
Week 2	<p><u>Methodology: Approaches and Challenges to <i>doing</i> Comparative Philosophy</u></p> <p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (For discussion on incommensurability): Alasdair Macintyre (1991), “Incommensurability, truth, and the conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians about the virtues.” • (For discussion on aims/tasks of CP): P. J. Ivanhoe (2012) “Understanding Traditional Chinese Philosophical Texts,” <i>International Philosophical Quarterly</i> 52.3, 303-14. Read here <p>Supplementary Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loy, Hui-Chieh (2022), “Philosophy and History, Custom and Ethics.” Read here. (Part I of paper). • (Historically important paper on method): Donald Davidson (1973-1974), “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme.” Read here. • (Historically important paper on method): Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960, 2004), “Language as the medium of hermeneutic experience.” Read here. • (Recent Discussion on method): See collection of papers in Burik et. al (2022), <i>Comparative Philosophy and Method: Contemporary Practices and Future Possibilities</i>. <p>Note: Response 1 due (HM students only).</p>
Part 2: Human Nature and Ethics	
Week 3	<p><u>Aristotle</u></p> <p>Required Readings:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Primary Text): See Aristotle, Selections (on Canvas) - De Anima II.1-3; Nicomachean Ethics I.7-8; I.13; II.1-7; X.7-8; Protrepticus 10 • (Secondary Discussion): Kathleen V. Wilkes (1978), “The Good Man and the Good for Man in Aristotle's Ethics” <p>For those new to Aristotle, in addition to SEP and IEP, I highly recommend Jeffrey Kaplan’s videos: https://www.youtube.com/@jeffreykaplan1</p>
Week 4	<p><u>Mengzi</u></p> <p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Primary Text): See Mencius, Selections (on Canvas) • (Secondary Discussion): A. C. Graham (2002), “The Background of the Mencian Theory of Human Nature.” <p>Supplementary Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Detailed Commentary): Irene Bloom (1994), “Mencian Arguments on Human Nature.” • (Accessible Commentary): Paul Goldin (2020), “Mencius.” • (Empirical Support): Ilari Mäkelä (2022), “An Empirical Argument for Mencius’ Theory of Human Nature.” <p>Note: Response 2 due (HM students only)</p> <p>For those new to Mencius, in addition to SEP and IEP, I highly recommend Bryan Van Norden’s videos: https://www.youtube.com/@BryanVanNordenPhilosophy</p>
Week 5	<p><u>Xunzi</u></p> <p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Primary Text): See Xunzi, Selections (on Canvas) • (Secondary Discussion): Sifu Tang (2016), “Xing and Xunzi’s Understanding of Our Natures” <p>Supplementary Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Comparison with Mengzi): Winnie Sung (2016), “Mencius and Xunzi on Xing (Human Nature).” • (Broader Comparisons): Eric Schwitzgebel (2007), “Human Nature and Moral Education in Mencius, Xunzi, Hobbes, and Rousseau” • (Reflective Piece): Eric Schwitzgebel (2022.), “Does the Heart Revolt at Evil.” <p>Note: Short Essay 1 due (15 September, 2359)</p> <p>For those new to Mencius, in addition to SEP and IEP, I highly recommend Bryan Van Norden’s videos: https://www.youtube.com/@BryanVanNordenPhilosophy</p>
Week 6	<p><u>David Hume</u></p> <p>Required Readings:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Primary Text): See Hume, Selections (on Canvas) • (Secondary Discussion): Jeremiah Carey and Rico Vitz (2019), “Mencius, Hume and the virtue of humanity sources of benevolent moral development.” <p>Supplementary Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jacqueline Taylor (2008), “Hume on Beauty and Virtue.” <p>Note: Response 3 due (HM students only)</p> <p>For those new to David Hume, in addition to SEP and IEP, I highly recommend Peter Millican’s videos: https://www.millican.org/hume.htm</p>
Week 7	<p><u>Wang Yangming</u></p> <p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Primary Text): See Wang Yangming, Selections (on Canvas) • (Secondary Discussion): Harvey Lederman (2022), “The Introspective Model of Genuine Knowledge in Wang Yangming.” <p>Supplementary Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Comparisons): Philip J. Ivanhoe (2011), “McDowell, Wang Yangming, and Mengzi’s Contributions to Understanding Moral Perception.” • (Wang on Moral Knowledge): Yong Huang (2017), “Knowing-that, Knowing how, or knowing to - Wang Yangming’s conception of moral knowledge (liangzhi).” <p>For those new to Wang Yangming, in addition to SEP and IEP, I highly recommend Bryan Van Norden’s videos: https://www.youtube.com/@BryanVanNordenPhilosophy</p>
Week 8	<p><u>Workshop: Writing Comparative Philosophy</u></p> <p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pick any two readings in the previous weeks where (at least) two philosophers are being compared with each other. Re-read these two papers and make notes on the different <i>methodological approaches</i> taken by the author. Share in class. <p>Supplementary Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • P. J. Ivanhoe (2012) “Understanding Traditional Chinese Philosophical Texts,” <i>International Philosophical Quarterly</i> 52.3, 303-14. Read here <p>Note: Response 4 due (HM students only)</p>
Part 3: Topical Comparisons	
Week 9	<p><u>Scepticism: Hume and Zhuangzi walk into a</u></p> <p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Primary Text): See Hume, Selections (on Canvas) • (Primary Text): See Zhuangzi, Selections (on Canvas)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Secondary Discussion): Eric Schwitzgebel (2006), “Zhuangzi’s Attitude Towards Language and His Scepticism.” <p>Supplementary Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Scepticism in Hume): Hsueh Qu (2020), “A New Epistemology.” • (Scepticism in Zhuangzi): Philip J. Ivanhoe (1993), “Zhuangzi on Scepticism, Skill and the Ineffable Dao.” • (Therapeutic Scepticism): Martha Craven Nussbaum (1991), “Skeptic Purgatives - Therapeutic Arguments in Ancient Scepticism.” <p>Interesting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • http://www.philosophicaltherapy.com/ <p>Note: Short Essay 2 due (20 October, 2359)</p>
Week 10	<p><u>Philosophy of Religion: Euthyphro, Mencius and the Problems of Evil</u></p> <p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Primary Text): See Euthyphro, Selections (on Canvas). Read online (recommended). • (Primary Text): See Mencius on Heaven, Selections (on Canvas). • (Secondary Discussion): Peter Van Inwagen (2003), “The Problem of Evil and the Argument from Evil.” <p>Supplementary Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Mencius on the Problem of Evil): Franklin Perkins (2014), “Reproaching Heaven and Serving Heaven in the Mengzi.” • (Mencius on the Problem of Evil): Daryl Ooi (2021), “Resenting Heaven in the Mencius.” • (Differing versions of the problems of evil): Kenneth Surin (1983), “Theodicy?” • (Kant on Theodicies): Immanuel Kant (1791), “On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials of Theodicy.” • (For fun): Daryl Ooi (2022), “Theistic Arguments from Horrendous Evils.”
Week 11	<p><u>Epistemology: A Contemporary Debate on Approaches to Wang Yangming</u></p> <p>Required Readings (rec. read in order):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harvey Lederman (2023), “Conceptions of Genuine Knowledge in Wang Yangming.” • Philip J. Ivanhoe (2022), “The Introspective, Perceptual, and Spontaneous Response Models of Wang Yangming’s Philosophy.” • Harvey Lederman (Manuscript) - Response to Ivanhoe, ‘The Introspective, Perceptual and Spontaneous Models of Wang Yangming’s Philosophy’ <p>Note: Response 5 due (HM students only)</p>
Part 4: Putting it back together	
Week 12	<p><u>Methodology: Revisiting Approaches and Challenges to <i>doing</i> Comparative Philosophy</u></p>

	<p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA depending on our class discussions <p>Supplementary Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA depending on our class discussions
Week 13	<p><u>Conclusion: The Future of Comparative Philosophy</u></p> <p>Required Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA depending on our class discussions <p>Supplementary Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TBA depending on our class discussions <p>Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public holiday (12 Nov 2023, Monday Off in lieu – reschedule?) • Long Essay due (17 Nov 2023, 2359)

Assessments:

PH4213 (100%)	10%	Participation	Weekly Participation
	20%	Presentation	One Presentation
	30%	Short Essays	2 x Short Essays (1000 words each)
	40%	Long Essay	1 x Long Essay (3000 words)

PH4213HM (125%)	10%	Participation	Weekly Participation
	20%	Presentation	One Presentation
	30%	Short Essays	2 x Short Essays (1000 words each)
	40%	Long Essay	1 x Long Essay (3000 words)
	25%	Pre-Lesson Responses	5 x Responses (400 words each)

PH5510 (100%)	10%	Participation	Weekly Participation
	20%	Presentation	One Presentation
	30%	Short Essays	2 x Short Essays (1500 words each)
	40%	Long Essay	1 x Long Essay (4000 words)

Presentation (20%)

- One student presentation each week (each presentation should be prepared and presented by two students). We will begin each seminar with a 40-minute presentation which should include the following components: (a) Presentation, (b) Q&A, (c) Facilitation.
- Expectations:
 - Presenters: Presentation should introduce our topic of discussion for the week (discuss and evaluate one required secondary reading). Feel free to make reference to other resources to supplement your discussion.
 - Rest of the class: Each student should prepare/contribute one question, clarification or comment.
- Grading: See Annex A.

Short Essays (30%)

- 2 short essays. Short Essay 1 due 15 Sep 2023; Short Essay 2 due 20 Oct.
- PH4213, PH4213HM: 1000 words; PH5510: 1500 words (including footnotes, in-text citations and references).
- Short Essay 1 will focus on *methodological considerations*, Short Essay 2 should compare two thinkers from different philosophical traditions.
- Handout recommended but optional
- Grading: Refer to Annex B

Long Essay (40%)

- 1 long essay. Due 17 Nov 2023.
- PH4213, PH4213HM: 3000 words; PH5510: 4000 words (including footnotes, in-text citations and references)
- Grading: Refer to Annex C

Pre-Lesson Responses (25%, PH4213HM students only)

- Pick at least one of the readings (of the week of submission, or the week prior).
- 400 words (including footnotes, in-text citations and references) – depending on the *style* of your response, footnotes, in-text citations and references may neither be expected nor needed.
- Grading: Refer to Annex D.

Annex A: Rubrics for Presentation (5m)

Clarity of Presentation, Charitable and accurate introduction of reading, Quality of argument/evaluation, Creativity and Originality of thought, Facilitation skills [equal weightage for each component].

Rubric	Description	Grade (/5)
Clarity of Presentation	Presentation should be clear. Your audience should be able to understand what you’re trying to say.	
Charitable and Accurate Representation of Reading	<p>You should ensure that you provide a charitable and accurate presentation of the reading. Try to understand the approach and motivations of the author.</p> <p>Where charity and accuracy conflict, say what you take to be the most accurate way to interpret/understand the author’s argument; and what you take the most charitable reading to consist in.¹</p>	
Quality of Argument/Evaluation	<p>If you agree with the reading, you should clearly articulate (and give reasons for) why you agree. Do you have independent reasons for this? Are there ways you can strengthen/clarify/apply the argument?</p> <p>If you disagree with the reading, you should clearly articulate (and give reasons for) why you disagree. If you have a better proposal, tell us about it – what is it, the upside of adopting it, how it addresses a concern etc.</p> <p>If you agree/disagree with different aspects of the reading, you should clearly articulate (and give reasons for) why you agree/disagree with the aspect you’re discussing.</p>	

¹ For further discussion, see Qu (2021), “The Virtue of Consistency.”

Creativity and Originality of Thought	<p><i>You</i> would have something to offer to the discussion. Do not merely do a ‘he said, she said, they said.’ What do <i>you</i> say?</p> <p>Note: Who says that validity is cheap? Many interesting arguments are abductive and require quite a bit of creativity – this makes it fun and interesting!</p>	
Facilitation of Discussion	Try your best to facilitate a fair, relatively safe, and productive dialogue among your peers. (It might be useful to pay attention to the notes on ‘Expectations for Discussions’ above).	

Annex B: Rubrics for Short Essay (60m)

	Excellent (8-10)	Good (6-7)	Needs Improvement (4-5)	Marginal (1-3)
Motivation (Clear problem identified; Significance of contribution)				
Argumentation A (Strength of Argument)				
Argumentation B (Insightfulness and Creativity)				
Understanding A (Demonstrates understanding of key concepts)				
Understanding B (Demonstrates understanding of relevant literature)				
Style A (Readability and Understandability)				
Total	/60			

Annex C: Rubrics for Long Essay (100m)

	Excellent (8-10)	Good (6-7)	Needs Improvement (4-5)	Marginal (1-3)
Motivation (Clear problem identified; Significance of contribution)				
Scope (Reasonable and manageable ambition/scope)				
Argumentation A (Strength of Argument)				
Argumentation B (Consideration of alternatives and counterarguments)				
Argumentation C (Insightfulness and Creativity)				
Understanding A (Demonstrates understanding of primary texts)				
Understanding B (Demonstrates understanding of key concepts)				
Understanding C (Demonstrates understanding of relevant literature)				
Style A (Readability and Understandability)				
Style B (Clear and easy-to-follow structure, well-organised)				
Total				

Annex D: Rubrics for Pre-Lesson Responses (5m)

	<u>Yes (1)</u>	<u>No (0)</u>
Identification of genuine concern/problem/point in a reading		
Fair interpretation of reading		
Understanding of key concept		
Insight		
Clarity		