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International Conference

Whither Comparative Philosophy?:  
Chinese Philosophy Encountering  
Other Traditions in the World

Programme Rundown

14-15 April 2023 (Fri-Sat)

Room 220, Fung King Hey Building, CUHK | Zoom Meeting ID: 944 1856 7676

# PROGRAMME RUNDOWN

## DAY 1 (14 April 2023, Friday)

09:00-09:15	<b>Opening Ceremony</b>	
	Prof. Alan K. L. CHAN Prof. Yong HUANG	Provost, The Chinese University of Hong Kong Chairman and Professor, Department of Philosophy, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
09:15-10:45	<b>Session 1</b>	<b>Moderator: Gregory MOSS, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</b>
09:15-10:00	Stephen ANGLE	Wesleyan University, USA Comparative Philosophy: What, Where, When, Why, and How?
10:00-10:45	Tao JIANG	Rutgers University, USA My Experience as a Comparative Philosopher
10:45-11:00	Coffee Break	
11:00-12:30	<b>Session 2</b>	<b>Moderator: Saulius GENIUSAS, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</b>
11:00-11:45	Jana ROŠKER	University of Ljubljana, Slovenia Transcultural Sublation: A New Approach in (Post-)Comparative Philosophy
11:45-12:30	Geir SIGURÐSSON	University of Iceland From Decontextualization to Recontextualization: Making Chinese Philosophy Relevant in the Contemporary World at Large
12:30-14:00	Lunch	The Harmony Shanghai Restaurant, Lee Woo Sing College
14:00-15:30	<b>Session 3</b>	<b>Moderator: Zemian ZHENG, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</b>
14:00-14:45	Dawid ROGACZ	Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland On Philosophical Histories of Chinese Philosophy: A Methodological Prelude
14:45-15:30	Ellie WANG	National Chengchi University, Taiwan Some Reflections on Bridge Concepts: A Case Study on Tao Jiang's Humaneness vs. Justice Interpretative Framework on Pre-Qin Thought
15:30-15:45	Coffee Break	
15:45-18:00	<b>Session 4</b>	<b>Moderator: Tien-chun LO, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</b>
15:45-16:30	Siu-fu TANG	University of Hong Kong Objectivity and Reasons: Xunzi and Scanlon
16:30-17:15	Jim BEHUNIAK	Colby College, USA Xing 性 and Natura: "Sameness" and "Difference" on the Human-and-Nature Continuum
17:15-18:00	Timothy CONNOLLY	East Stroudsburg University, USA Zhuangzi and Transformative Experience
18:00-20:00	Dinner	Jade Pavilion, Royal Park Hotel

*\*Each presenter will have 30 minutes for presentation, followed by 15 minutes of discussion.*

## DAY 2 (15 April 2023, Saturday)

09:00-11:15	<b>Session 5</b>	<b>Moderator: Fan-lun MANG, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</b>
09:00-09:45	Qingjie WANG University of Macau	Is “Chinese Philosophy” a “Philosophy in China” or a “Philosophy from China”?
09:45-10:30	So Jeong PARK Sungkyunkwan University, Korea	Concept-Historical Approach to Comparative Philosophy: Beyond the Chinese-Western Axis
10:30-11:15	Chung-yi CHENG The Chinese University of Hong Kong	A New Interpretation of Classical Confucian Political Philosophy
11:15-11:30	Coffee Break	
11:30-13:00	<b>Session 6</b>	<b>Moderator: Ethan NOWAK, Umeå University, Sweden</b>
11:30-12:15	Winnie SUNG Nanyang Technological University, Singapore	A Confucian Account of Trustworthiness
12:15-13:00	Zemian ZHENG The Chinese University of Hong Kong	Precursory Trust and Apodictic Trust: A Confucian Response to Max Weber
13:00-14:15	Lunch Japanese Lunchboxes, Room G24, Fung King Hey Building	
14:15-15:45	<b>Session 7</b>	<b>Moderator: Jiji ZHANG, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</b>
14:15-15:00	David CHAI The Chinese University of Hong Kong	Martin Buber’s Engagement with Daoism: From the In-Between to Genuine Dialogue
15:00-15:45	Ruiping FAN City University of Hong Kong	Bioethical Principlism as Bioethical Globalism: A Critical Appraisal from a Confucian Perspective
15:45-16:00	Coffee Break	
16:00-17:30	<b>Session 8</b>	<b>Moderator: Lei ZHONG, The Chinese University of Hong Kong</b>
16:00-16:45	Kam-por YU Polytechnic University of Hong Kong	What Is Special about Confucian Virtue Ethics?
16:45-17:30	Yong HUANG The Chinese University of Hong Kong	Agent-based Moral Realism: Zhu Xi’s Virtue Ethics Approach to a Meta-ethical Issue
17:30-17:45	Closing Ceremony	
18:00-20:00	Dinner Asian-European Cuisine, Science Park	

*\*Each presenter will have 30 minutes for presentation, followed by 15 minutes of discussion.*

## **SESSION 1 | 14 APR, 09:15-10:45**

### **Comparative Philosophy: What, Where, When, Why, and How?**

**Stephen ANGLE, Wesleyan University, USA**

Despite the political polarization that characterizes many of our societies and much of the world, comparative philosophy — which depends on crossing various kinds of boundaries — is intellectually and professionally doing reasonably well. Exciting new work continues to appear and venues for publication and discussion (print and digital, in person and on-line) are proliferating. Another thing that is proliferating, though, is names for what it is we are doing. Are comparative, cross-cultural, intercultural, blended, and fusion philosophy all the same thing? What do they share and where do they diverge, and why? Can we identify a distinctive project of comparative philosophy and say why it is important? Based on a broad survey of approaches, in this essay I offer schematic answers to these questions. I will argue that whenever we do philosophy by drawing on at least two significantly different traditions of philosophy, we are doing comparative philosophy. Unpacking some of the key words in this definition will enable me to clarify some persistent confusions as well as to stress the constitutive gamble that lies at the heart of all comparative philosophy.

## SESSION 1 | Cont'd

### My Experience as a Comparative Philosopher

Tao JIANG, Rutgers University, USA

This paper offers a reflection of my own experience as a comparative philosopher over the last two decades. I was preoccupied by the methodology and rationale for comparative philosophy from the very beginning. My questions were: why should I do comparative philosophy? What do I gain or lose in the comparative approach to Chinese philosophy? Who is the intended audience of comparative philosophy? etc. Those questions are very much reflected in my first book, *Contexts and Dialogue: Yogācāra Buddhism and Modern Psychology on the Subliminal Mind* (University of Hawaii Press, 2006). My conclusion at the time was that comparative philosophy is not simply a list of similarities and differences between some randomly selected concepts from two philosophical works and/or systems that had no obvious historical connections. Rather, a comparative project needs to be carefully set up in order for it to be fruitful and constructive. Cultural, historical, and philosophical contexts are crucial in properly setting up a comparative project. What is especially invaluable for me was the way comparative philosophy problematizes what is easily taken for granted within one intellectual milieu. Comparison provides an invaluable way to understand what is often assumed and taken for granted in a system we are familiar with as it promises to bridge two different conceptual worlds.

However, I learned something else in that process. That is, comparative philosophy, despite its apparent lure, also has serious problems in attracting the kind of audience it hopes to attract. A reader needs to be interested (or can be persuaded that they should be interested) in both sides of a comparative project in order for them to engage the work. This demanding aspect of comparative philosophy means that a reader interested in one aspect of a work might not read the work at all. In other words, I had wished that someone who is interested in one side of the comparison can be allured into engaging with the other side as well, but I was rather disappointed. Such frustration with comparative philosophy is one of the reasons that I have devoted more time in recent years to Chinese philosophy itself and its history, resulting in the second book, *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China* (Oxford University Press, 2021). But, of course, the obvious issue is that I write in English and the comparative element is built into all of my works, even though *prima facie* they do not look particularly comparative (some notable exceptions notwithstanding). In other words, explicit comparison has receded in my more recent works and comparison has become more implicit and even embedded.

So my experience in the last two decades as a comparative philosopher tells me that we need to be more solidly grounded in Chinese philosophical texts, with all its cultural, historical, and linguistic aspects, such that we do not simply toy with words and concepts in the comparative project. Furthermore, it is important to find the right partners to engage in the comparative project, with the hope that some new ideas can be generated in the process, instead of being limited to the exegesis of the transmitted texts. I will offer examples from my experience to illustrate these points.

## SESSION 2 | 14 APR, 11:00-12:30

### **Transcultural Sublation: A New Approach in (Post-)Comparative Philosophy**

**Jana ROŠKER, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia**

The paper addresses the considerable difficulties Western scholars face in studying the intellectual histories of non-Western cultures. To this end, the project will first evaluate differences between cross-cultural, intercultural, and transcultural methods and identify common challenges faced by traditional methods of comparative philosophy. The project team will then propose new strategies to overcome these challenges and demonstrate how these new approaches can produce more comprehensive and accurate models for comparative transcultural philosophy, thereby minimizing or resolving the problems of traditional methods.

It begins by examining the semantic and hermeneutical implications of culturally divergent frames of reference and demonstrates the need for discursive translations. Then, I will conduct a critical analysis of different methodologies that have been previously used in the field of intercultural comparative philosophy, such as the philosophy of fusion and philosophy of synthesis. On this basis, we will propose a new comparative approach that incorporates a new technique called "transcultural philosophical sublation," which can add value to the field by providing a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness and complex relationships between different cultures and philosophical traditions.

Since the concept of "sublation" is one that comes from Hegelian lines of thought, it could be seen as problematic for transcultural discourse. But it is far less deflationary than, for example, the method of "synthesis." It encompasses all three terms crucial to the process of creating something new from the interactions between different objects or phenomena, i.e. elimination, preservation, and arising. Unlike "synthesis" or "fusion," the term "sublation" refers to a process rather than a stage. This dynamic and non-essential nature makes it a useful concept for describing new forms of transcultural philosophizing better and more accurately than other approaches developed so far.

**Keywords:** Sublation, comparative philosophy, transcultural studies post-comparative philosophy, frameworks of reference

## SESSION 2 | Cont'd

### **From Decontextualization to Recontextualization: Making Chinese Philosophy Relevant in the Contemporary World at Large**

**Geir SIGURÐSSON, University of Iceland**

In this paper, I will propose that those focusing on Chinese philosophy – as well as other non-western and even non-contemporaneous philosophies – can profit from the hermeneutic theory of Paul Ricoeur in their endeavors to make it more applicable to our contemporary world. More specifically, I will argue that a conscious and deliberate use of Ricoeur's notions of distanciation, decontextualization and recontextualization has a potential to facilitate such a task. It involves acknowledging, among other things, that philosophy is first and foremost a creative (and not a narrow scientific) dialogue of ideas that in many cases need to be taken out their original context in order to be applied in others that may (and often do) involve concepts and trajectories that were not yet in existence at the time of their original conception. Such a "methodological" proposal may even turn out to resonate significantly with at least some historical Chinese approaches to classical texts created in long-gone times. In tandem with Western hermeneutic theory, therefore, these Chinese approaches may also have much to contribute to the important discussion of how to find a way to move from sinology to philosophy, as e.g. broached in the very beginning of Tao Jiang's recent and well-received monograph.

## SESSION 3 | 14 APR, 14:00-15:30

### On Philosophical Histories of Chinese Philosophy: A Methodological Prelude

Dawid ROGACZ, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland

If the history of Chinese philosophy is to be truly treated on an equal footing with histories of western philosophy, it cannot be reduced to a mere history of philosophical ideas, much less to the history of ideas whose significance is temporally and spatially limited. How to make such history, and what are the theoretical preconditions of such an approach – this is one of the chief challenges of the contemporary studies on world philosophy. Quite emblematically, even Hegel did not deny the existence of Chinese philosophy, but rather its importance for the development of universal culture (*Geist*), and that, in this sense, it is nothing but local wisdom. It was not until Karl Jaspers that German thinkers denounced that standpoint.

Unfortunately, a purely historicist (/Sinological) approach to Chinese philosophy cannot save us from reducing the latter to the domain of “thought,” “ideas,” and “beliefs.” Historical relativism has always been strictly connected with the *Weltanschauungsphilosophie*, which rejects to search for any extra-historical criteria for evaluating philosophies. Fortunately, however, recent studies (e.g., Tao Jiang) have started distinguishing philosophical and historical perspectives on Chinese philosophy. The roots of such a strategy are much older, as even Marxists such as Zhang Dainian (1909-2004) tried to portray the development of Chinese philosophy through the prism of the transformations of its core categories. In her recent monograph, Jana Rošker elaborates on a whole (synchronic) dictionary of Chinese philosophy, which makes it different from the very metatheoretical framework of western philosophies. I believe that the next step is to reconstruct Chinese philosophy as a long-lasting and ongoing exchange of arguments employing these concepts, as it is done concerning western standpoints.

I want to argue that any philosophical history of Chinese philosophy must:

- (1) assume and then prove its importance for universally understandable and relevant questions, mainly through philosophical reconstruction (extraction) of its arguments;
- (2) depict it as a history of argumentative debates held throughout ages and across “schools”;
- (3) show its (permanent) contribution to the universal (“our”) understanding of philosophical issues in question, at least partially through the actualization of its philosophical answers.

## SESSION 3 | Cont'd

### Some Reflections on Bridge Concepts: A Case Study on Tao Jiang's Humaneness vs. Justice Interpretative Framework on Pre-Qin Thought

Ellie WANG, National Chengchi University, Taiwan

In the study of comparative philosophy, a common discursive tool is the "bridge concept". A "bridge concept" is not an original concept of any tradition in the comparison, nor is it a concept already shared by the parties in the dialogue. It is proposed by the researchers in order to connect the different but related concepts of the parties in the dialogue—to build bridges to approximate the respective concepts of the parties in question. A bridge concept thus forms a basis for comparison and dialogue, and to serve this purpose, it has relatively thin but clear content. Researchers can use it as a basis to guide readers to see the connection between different but related concepts. Because the "bridge concept" is not an original concept of any tradition in the dialogue, the use of this conceptual tool can avoid the doubts of improperly applying the concept of one tradition to another tradition, and it does not presuppose that the parties in question in fact share a certain concept.

Understood in this way, the scope of a bridge concept is basically determined by the purpose of the research, and correspondingly, there are some restrictions on its use. This article hopes to discuss the relevant limitations by reflecting on a particular use of bridge concepts in Jiang 2021. In his book, *Origins of Moral-Political Philosophy in Early China*, Jiang used two concepts, "humaneness" and "justice", as thin bridge concepts to structure his interpretation of pre-Qin moral politics. Jiang focuses his attention to the different positions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism on differential treatment and renders Confucianism (especially Mencius' thought) partialist and (thus) siding with the humaneness. I argue that this special focus on differential treatment is problematic, and does not recognize that "humaneness" and "justice" may be integrated when we take different levels of a theory into account. This problematic focus, I further argue, may result from the contrasting use of bridge concepts in Jiang's account, and it in the end blinds us to other relevant texts and does not allow for a more nuanced interpretation for Confucianism (or other schools of thought in question). This case thus demonstrates a risk of using bridge concepts in contrasting structures. Aided by Jiang's interpretation of Xunzi in the book and some reflections on the way "*ren qing*"(人情) is used in the legal documents in the Song dynasty, I propose a possible alternative use of bridge concepts in this case at the end of the paper.

## SESSION 4 | 14 APR, 15:45-18:00

### Objectivity and Reasons: Xunzi and Scanlon

Siu-fu TANG, University of Hong Kong

In this paper I compare and contrast Xunzi and T. M. Scanlon's understanding of reasons for action. The emphasis will be on their respective conceptions of practical reasoning and the corresponding metaphysical and particularly metaethical positions about reasons. Given that both Xunzi and Scanlon affirm ethical reasons have truth values and are objective, I inquire if any ground is gained or lost by further insisting on being a realist on ethical reasons. It is also in this process of comparative study I articulate my understanding of comparative philosophy as text-based responses to common questions of humanity.

### Xing 性 and Natura: "Sameness" and "Difference" on the Human-and-Nature Continuum

Jim BEHUNIAK, Colby College, USA

As Zhuangzi says, "Knowing what Nature (天) does and knowing what the Human (人) does is the optimal standpoint." But how does one reach this standpoint? How does one know where "Nature" ends and the "Human" begins? This question has become especially important in the field of comparative philosophy. There are common traits that all people share regardless of culture. These can be called as "Nature" (天). Meanwhile, there are distinct traits that people possess that are contingent on culture. These can be called as "Human" (人). In this paper, the philosophy of John Dewey is evoked to develop a pragmatic approach to what appears to be a seamless continuum between the "Human" and "Nature" (天人合一). According to such an approach, inquiries into "sameness" and "difference" are diverse, and they register something in addition to the two things being compared. In this paper, comparing the Greek "thing" concept (*ousia*) and the Chinese "thing" concept (事) will be used as an illustrative case.

### Zhuangzi and Transformative Experience

Timothy CONNOLLY, East Stroudsburg University, USA

A transformative experience – such as having a child, going through a religious conversion, or fighting in a war—is a life event that changes us in some deep way that we could not have known without living through it. Because the version of ourselves that has lived through the event is inaccessible to ourselves at present, such experiences, according to L.A. Paul in her influential discussion, challenge the notion that we are able to plan in advance the kind of life we want. In this paper, I use Zhuangzi's ideas to explore a "new" perspective on the issue. As a text in classical Chinese philosophy that deals with the transformation of things (*wuhua* 物化), the *Zhuangzi* relies on different assumptions about the nature of transformative experience and the place of human beings within a transforming world. While I aim to use this text to explore a unique view, I also want to use Paul's discussion to bring out some interesting ideas from the *Zhuangzi*, primarily about the shift in perspective that emerges as a result of transformative experience, and how this new perspective enables our ability to respond to this sort of experience.

## SESSION 5 | 15 APR, 9:00-11:15

### Is “Chinese Philosophy” a “Philosophy in China” or a “Philosophy from China”?

**Qingjie WANG, University of Macau**

The essay argues for a new understanding of “Chinese Philosophy” as a “Philosophy from China.” I shall start first with an analysis of the different meanings of the popular Chinese particle “of 的” in the modern Chinese language both linguistically and philosophically. Secondly, a new understanding of “Chinese philosophy” as a “philosophy from China” will be introduced. I will distinguish it from the three previous philosophical understandings of the “Chinese philosophy,” i.e., 1) as “China’s philosophy 中國的哲學,” 2) as “philosophy in China 哲學在中國,” and 3) as “China-grounded philosophy 中國底哲學,” etc. Many modern Chinese philosophers like Jin Yuelin 金岳霖 (1895-1984), Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895-1990), and Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909-1995) discussed these ideas before. Third, I shall conclude by saying that “Chinese philosophy” is neither a metaphysically *a priori* nor a teleological conception. Rather, it belongs to a historical-genealogical “*Bildung*” of “philosophizing” that was and will continue to be future-oriented, open, and always renewing.

### Concept-Historical Approach to Comparative Philosophy: Beyond the Chinese-Western Axis

**So Jeong PARK, Sungkyunkwan University, Korea**

Comparative philosophy has played a role of healing and reviving “philosophy,” while criticizing the universality of *Philosophy*. As the Chinese-Western axis has become dominant in comparative philosophy, we are now out of the early stages of simply comparing the similarities and differences between two traditions. However, the prevailing trend in comparative philosophy today is to interpret the ideas of ancient Chinese philosophers through the lens of modern Western thinkers or to reframe ancient Chinese thought to address contemporary philosophical concerns. This approach gives the impression that Chinese philosophy has not evolved up to the present day and is only seen as a static resource from which modern philosophers can draw upon to solve contemporary problems.

I believe that a concept-historical approach can be a methodology to correct this imbalance. What I mean by “concept-historical approach” is to view concepts as historically constructed through various discussions and interpretations, not as being fixed and immutable once defined. Revolutionary change in concepts that fundamentally changed the traditional worldview and symbol system occurred not only in the West, but also in non-Western societies. Tracing the conceptual history that has developed in the non-Western world, particularly in East Asia, enables us to identify what ancient Chinese philosophy and modern East Asian philosophy share and where they diverge. By doing so, we can have cross-cultural dialogue in real-time, instead of comparing ancient Chinese philosophy with modern Western philosophy.

In this paper, I would like to pay attention to the changes in the major concepts of ancient China, such as “情 (ch. *Qíng*, kr. *Jeong*)” and “氣 (ch. *Qì*, kr. *Gi*)” as examples. I will first look at the process that these concepts have been transformed into today’s implications, and then discuss what roles they play in contemporary Korean and Chinese language and culture. Lastly, I will explore the potential outcomes of conducting comparative philosophy by incorporating a temporal axis that extends from the past to the present, in addition to the existing east-west spatial axis.

## **SESSION 5 | Cont'd**

### **A New Interpretation of Classical Confucian Political Philosophy**

**Chung-yi CHENG, The Chinese University of Hong Kong**

Several general understandings of classical Confucian political philosophy, if not false, are misleading. For example, some contend that the ancient Confucians adopt a moral or virtuous reductionist view in their conceptualization of politics. Accordingly, the matters of politics should finally be related to the moral cultivation of rulers. Some further consider that the early Confucians rest good governance on having a sage king with a worthy minister. Hence, it is natural to criticize this view as impossibly idealistic and hopelessly overestimating the effectiveness of rule by people. This paper aims to offer a new interpretation of classical Confucian political philosophy against all these general yet misleading understandings, trying to be sympathetic and not make a straw man out of it. The new interpretation consists of two parts: The goal of the first part is to introduce a Confucian ontology of politics that not only says what politics is but also has implications for what politics should be; the goal of the second part is to illuminate the Confucian normative political philosophy that emphasizes the importance of both individual and institutional aspects, arguing that while they are irreducible to each other they are inseparably complementary.

## SESSION 6 | 15 APR, 11:00-13:00

### A Confucian Account of Trustworthiness

Winnie SUNG, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

This article outlines a Confucian account of trustworthiness by discussing three key Confucian concepts—*xin* 信, *zhong* 忠, and *cheng* 誠. My development of this account might go beyond what the early thinkers themselves have thought about trustworthiness. Nonetheless, the account of trustworthiness I present here is characteristically Confucian and compatible with the general contours of Confucian thinking.

In trying to understand the early Confucian conception of trustworthiness, it might be tempting to focus on the concept *xin* 信, which is often translated as “trustworthiness.” Although the concept *xin* might overlap with much of what we nowadays think about trustworthiness, it alone is too narrow to capture the Confucian conception of trustworthiness. The early Confucian concepts are intimately linked as a cluster. And the cluster usually only approximates our contemporary understanding of a certain attribute, psychological phenomenon, or state. In the early texts, *xin* 信 as an ethical attribute is often discussed along with two other concepts: *zhong* 忠 (loyalty) and *cheng* 誠 (sincerity/wholeheartedness). In order to have a better understanding of the Confucian conception of trustworthiness, we will need to at least consider *xin*, *zhong*, and *cheng* together. Since these concepts are closely linked, it is challenging to isolate one concept from the others. That said, I will first attempt to focus on the aspect that is relevant to our consideration of trustworthiness in each concept and then try to pull the ideas together into a larger picture. This should present at least the rough contours of the Confucian conception of trustworthiness.

### Precursory Trust and Apodictic Trust: A Confucian Response to Max Weber

Zemian ZHENG, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Max Weber claims that Confucianism was uncondusive to the emergence of capitalism in pre-modern China because it did not foster trust among strangers, unlike Protestantism for the Europe. In response, I propose a tripartite division of trust: (1) empirical trust based on observation; (2) precursory trust that is pre-reflective, not based on observation, but serves as an indispensable pre-understanding out of which trust can emerge; and (3) apodictic trust that goes beyond empirical trust and claims that one should be inclusive towards people, not based on any desirable consequence but out of apodictic moral duty. This apodictic trust can be expressed as follows: “Trust a person unless one has good reasons not to do so.” Although this formula is not “unconditional” in Kant’s ethics, I would still call it “apodictic,” because it obliges people to trust one another on infinitely vast occasions. The recent philosophical literature mostly focuses on empirical trust, and a few of them has pointed at the direction of either precursory trust or apodictic trust, but most of them discuss only one separate aspect. With this tripartite framework, I respond to Weber by a synthesis: Confucian emphasizes precursory trust, while Protestantism emphasizes apodictic trust, but they are not exclusive to each other.

## **SESSION 7 | 15 APR, 14:15-15:45**

### **Martin Buber's Engagement with Daoism: From the In-Between to Genuine Dialogue**

**David CHAI, The Chinese University of Hong Kong**

Martin Buber saw in Daoism a set of ideas that could assist him in addressing modern society's approach to thinking about being while engaging others in genuine dialogue. Taking the Daoist view that words bring to life the silence from which they arise and recede, Buber argues the in-between that is generated when two people partake in genuine dialogue spiritually attunes them to the primal Thou. In this way, Buber's turn to Daoism led to a new model of edification from which modern society could be brought out of the disillusionment of individualism and into the clearing of mutual nourishment that is authentic life.

### **Bioethical Principlism as Bioethical Globalism: A Critical Appraisal from a Confucian Perspective**

**Ruiping FAN, City University of Hong Kong**

Beauchamp and Childress' bioprinciplism version of global bioethics has apparently succeeded. The four principles they have proposed have been adopted generally in every region of the world (from the West to the East) and broadly in every field of inquiry (from clinics to biomedical research), regardless of people's particular religious, cultural, or moral convictions. This paper will demonstrate that this version of global bioethics must fundamentally fail. Beauchamp and Childress identify two features of their four principles: first, the principles are "broad, abstract, and content-thin" so that "they are indeterminate and thus require further specification to generate more definite content"; moreover, "because they are not ranked a priori..., balancing or specification is required when [they] conflict" so that they "generate norms of particular moralities, including particular sociocultural traditions and professional moralities." However, people from different moral traditions readily specify and rank these principles according to the particular moral norms they are practicing in their traditions (while such norms differ from tradition to tradition and are incommensurable with each other). Consequently, although they are apparently "applying" the four "universal" principles, what they are actually producing and practicing are different regional bioethics substantiated by their particular moral norms. In some regions, a typical way to employ the four-principle approach is to rule that the principle of respect for autonomy should trump the other three principles, while in other regions the principle of beneficence often dominates, even if neither is what Beauchamp and Childress intended. Thus, the "universal" application of bioprinciplism does not help resolve concrete bioethical dilemmas universally. This paper draws on the Confucian understanding of the nature of morality in terms of ritual to argue why this principlist version of global bioethics is deeply flawed.

## **SESSION 8 | 15 APR, 16:00-17:30**

### **What Is Special about Confucian Virtue Ethics?**

**Kam-por YU, Polytechnic University of Hong Kong**

This paper attempts to highlight the special characteristics of Confucian virtue ethics, bring out their practical implications, and investigate the merits of such an understanding of virtue ethics.

### **Agent-based Moral Realism: Zhu Xi's Virtue Ethics Approach to a Meta-ethical Issue**

**Yong HUANG, The Chinese University of Hong Kong**

Moral realism is normally considered to consist of two theses: (1) (a) moral propositions can be true or false, and (b) at least some of them are true, and (2) their truth depends upon moral properties or facts that are mind-independent in a relevant sense. By affirming 1 (a) it distinguishes itself from moral non-cognitivism, a view that moral propositions are expressions of emotion in disguise and thus don't have truth values; by affirming 1 (b), it distinguishes itself from moral error theory, according to which moral propositions are describing things that don't exist and thus can never be true; and by affirming 2, it distinguishes itself from moral subjectivism, claiming that the truth of propositions is mind-dependent. Within moral realism, depending upon how the objective moral properties or facts are understood, according to a well-known distinction, there are naturalistic moral realism, regarding moral properties and facts as natural properties and facts, and non-naturalistic moral realism, regarding them as non-natural properties and facts; according to a less-known, if not entirely new, classification, crucial to this essay though, there are action-focused moral realism, primarily concerned with the moral properties of rightness and wrongness of the action, and agent-focused moral realism, taking the moral properties of the goodness and badness of the agent as its primary concern. Combining these two classifications, we may have non-naturalistic action-focused moral realism, non-naturalistic agent-focused moral realism, naturalistic action-focused moral realism, and naturalistic agent-focused moral realism.

I've not found a truly satisfactory version of non-naturalistic moral realism, largely because it can only tell us what moral properties and facts are not (not natural ones) but doesn't tell us what they are; even when it appears to tell us something positive about them, such as "they are like mathematical properties," what they essentially tell us is still negative, as the only similarity they show us between moral properties and mathematical ones is that they are not natural ones. So, in this essay, I shall defend a naturalistic moral realism. Naturalistic moral realism, however, faces some apparently insurmountable difficulties, which may partially explain not only why there are moral anti-realists but also why some moral realists go non-naturalistic. So I shall first briefly explain some of these main difficulties (Section 2). These difficulties, however, seem to mostly involve the action-focused brand of moral realism, the predominant type of moral realism in contemporary meta-ethics, which corresponds to consequentialism and deontology dominant in contemporary normative ethics, and not the agent-focused moral realism, which corresponds to ancient virtue ethics experiencing its contemporary revival as a normative ethics. So this essay develops and defends a naturalistic agent-focused moral realism. In Section 3, I shall explain some main features of this type of moral realism, its instantiation in the Aristotelian virtue ethics, and the limitation of this particular instantiation. In Section 4, I present its more promising instantiation in Zhu Xi's neo-Confucian virtue ethics, and in Section 5, I will show how such a version of moral realism can handle the tough questions facing moral realism, particularly its naturalistic brand. I shall conclude with a brief summary (Section 6).