

**PHIL5330 Seminar: Issues in the History of Chinese Philosophy: East and West:  
Moral Relativism**

(Preliminary and Tentative; subject to changes)

**Location:** AIT G01 **Time:** 18:30 to 21:15, Wednesday, Term I 2018-19

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**Course overview**

“Moral relativism” is often used as a term of condemnation: the easiest way to discredit a moral theory is to say that it is a type of relativism. In this course, we will first read and discuss the works by Gilbert Harman and David Wong, the two most prominent philosophers of those very few who have openly, seriously, and persistently identified themselves as moral relativists and defended moral relativism passionately. In the West philosophical tradition, relativism is divided into two kinds. The agent centered moral relativism claims that the rightness or wrongness of an action is relative to the moral standard of agent (the person who performs the action), while the appraiser centered moral relativism claims that the rightness or wrongness of an action is relative to the moral standard of the appraiser (the person who makes the moral judgment). There are serious problems with both forms of relativism. We shall examine how Harman and Wong try to deal with these problems and to what extent they succeed and to what extent they fail. In the last part of the course, we shall read the Daoist text Zhuangzi as presenting a benign kind of moral relativism unseen in the Western philosophical tradition: a patient centered moral relativism, which claims that the moral rightness or wrongness of an action is relative to the standard of the patient (the recipient of the action). Attempts will be made to show how the patient centered moral relativism can not only address the perceived problems of moral universalism but can also avoid the respective problems of the two familiar types of moral relativism.

**Learning outcomes**

1. Develop sensitivity to the common concerns of human existence especially from a comparative perspective between eastern and western of philosophy.
2. Equip students with life-long learning capacities especially through understanding of the connections between academic pursuits and life experience.
3. Relate the subject matters to human experience and/or modern life.

**Learning activities**

1. Students are supposed to attend weekly class sessions regularly; absence without excusable reasons is not tolerated;
2. Students are supposed to come to class prepared, with the assigned readings for the given class carefully read;
3. Students are supposed to actively participate at classroom discussions by raising questions and/or making comments regarding either the assigned readings or the instructor’s lectures or fellow students’ comments;
4. Students are supposed to write two short papers (each with a minimum of 8 pages, double spaced, Times New Romans font size 12, with regular margins) and one longer paper (with a minimum of 15 pages). The first short paper is on Harman, due on at the class on October 3; the second short paper is on Wong, due at the class on November 8, and the longer paper is cumulative but must at least partially involve Zhuangzi (and/or the instructor’s interpretation of it), due on December 19 (you may e-mail it to me). They must be accompanied by a signed Veriguide form. Paper turned in after the class but before the end of the day are accepted with light discount (for example an A grade will be discounted as A-); papers turned in after the due date but within a week are accepted with a heavy discount (for example, an A grade will be discounted as B). After one week of the due date, no papers will be accepted;
5. Students are supposed to do two class presentations, based on the papers written as required above.

**Guidelines of Papers:**

For each paper, choose a topic of you own interest from those discussed in class. Make sure that this is a topic about which you have something of your own to say; summarize the relevant discussions of the topic

by the author(s) we read and discussed in class; explain what part(s) of this position you have most agreements and, more importantly, disagreements with; develop your own position, or provide your own arguments, and explain how your position or arguments will be able to overcome the problems with, or further support, the position you summarize; think what objections (possible or actual, including from those authors we discussed) there might be to your arguments; try to respond such objections. Your paper may have an introductory paragraph (announce what you are going to do in this paper) and a concluding paragraph (summarize the main arguments of your paper). You may also consider divide your paper into several sections.

In addition to the required readings, you may also consult secondary literatures. Whatever materials you are using, it is imperative to indicate very clearly from which sources these materials are (title of the book, or title of the article and the journal in which the article is published, publication year, and page number).

#### Assessment scheme

<i>Task nature</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Class preparation/participation	Preparation for and participation at class discussions	10
Two short papers	Due on Oct 3 (on Harman) and Nov 14 (on Wong)	15 each (30)
One long paper	Due on Dec 17 (cumulative, involving Zhuangzi)	40
Two Presentations		10 each (20)

#### Recommended learning resources

- Ames, Roger and Takahiro Nakajima eds., 2015 *Zhuangzi and the Happy Fish*. Honolulu: U of Hawaii Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. 1998. *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Cook, Scott, ed. 2003, *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Dimitrijevic, Nenad. 2010. "Moral Knowledge and Mass Crime: A Critical Reading of Moral Relativism." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36: 131–156.
- Fraser, Chris, 2009. "Skepticism and Value in the Zhuangzi," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 49(4): 439–547.
- Hales, S., ed. 2011, *A Companion to Relativism*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Harman, Gilbert and Judith Thomson. 1996. *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*, by Gilbert Haman and Judith Jarvis Thomson.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2000. *Explaining Values and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Huang, Yong, 2018. "Patient Relativism in the Zhuangzi." *Philosophia*.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2015. "Respect for Differences: The Daoist Virtue." In *Routledge Companion to Virtue Ethics*. Edited by Michael Slote and Lorraine Besser-Jones, Routledge, 99-112.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2014. "Toward a Benign Moral Relativism: From Agent/Critics-centered to the Patient-centered, in *Moral Relativism and Chinese Philosophy: David Wong and Critics*, edited by Yang Xiao and Yong Huang, State University of New York Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2010a. "The Ethics of Difference in the Zhuangzi." *Journal of American Academy of Religion* 78.1: 65-99.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2010b. "Respecting Different Ways of Life: A Daoist Ethics of Virtue in the Zhuangzi." *Journal of Asian Studies* 69.4: 1049-1070.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2010c. "理解他者：戴維森的第一人稱之權威." *哲學分析* 1.3: 19-36.
- \_\_\_\_\_, 2005a. "A Copper Rule versus the Golden Rule: A Daoist-Confucian Proposals for Global Ethics." *Philosophy East & West* 55. 3: 394-425.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2005b. "解釋學的兩種類型：為己之學與為人之學." *復旦學報*, No.2: 45-52.
- Kjellberg, Paul and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds. 1996. *Essays on Skepticism, Relativism, and Ethics in the Zhuangzi*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Krausz, Michael, ed. 1989, *Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation*, Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. 2010, *Relativism: A Contemporary Anthology*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lyons, David. 1976. "Ethical Relativism and the Problem of Incoherence." *Ethics* 86 (2): 107-121.
- Mair, Victor. 1983. *Experimental Essays on Chuang-tzu*. Honolulu: [published for] Center for Asian and Pacific Studies [by] University of Hawai'i Press
- John McDowell, 1998, "Might There Be External Reason?" in his *Mind, Value, and Reality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1994, "Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification," in L. Gormally (ed.) *Moral Truth*

*and Moral Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe*, Blackrock, County Dublin: Four Courts Press, 6–24.

Moody-Adams, Michelle. 1994. “Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance.” *Ethics* 104: 291-309

Scanlon, Thomas. 1998. “Relativism,” in his *What We Owe to Each Other*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Thomason, Judith. 1996. “Moral Objectivity,” in *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*, by Gilbert Harman and Judith Jarvis Thomson.

Wiggins, David. 1990-91, “Moral Cognitivism, Moral Relativism and Motivating Moral Beliefs,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 91: 61–85.

Williams, Bernard, 1981a. “Internal and External Reasons,” in his *Moral Luck* (101-113). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—, 1981b. “The Truth in Relativism,” in Williams, *Moral Luck*, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 132–43. Original Publication Date: 1974–75.

Wong, David, 1984. *Moral Relativity*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

———. 2006. *Natural Moralities: A Defense of Pluralistic Relativism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2011. “Relativist Explanation of Interpersonal and Group Disagreement,” in S.D. Hales (ed.), *A Companion to Relativism*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 411–29.

———. 2014. “Response to Huang,” in *Moral Relativism and Chinese Philosophy: David Wong and Critics*, edited by Yang Xiao and Yong Huang, State University of New York Press.

Xiao, Yang and Yong Huang. 2014. *Moral Relativism and Chinese Philosophy: David Wong and Critics*. Albany. State University of New York Press.

Zhuangzi. (any edition, Chinese or English)

Zimmerman, Michael. 1997. “Moral Responsibility and Ignorance.”

**Course schedule** (Classes on September 26 and October 31 are cancelled; they will be made up on December 5 and 12 respectively)

<b>Week</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Required reading</b>
1 (September 5)	(1) Introduction of the Course (2) Introduction to the topic: Varieties of Moral Relativism	Lyons
2 (September 12)	Harman’s Relativism 1: Critics/Appraiser Relativism	Harman and Thomson 1996: chapters 1, 3-5 (see also 10)
3 (September 19)	Harman’s Relativism 2: Agent Relativism Harman’s Relativism 3: Morality as Politics	Harman 2000: chapters 3 and 4; and Harman 1996: chapter 2
(September 26)	Class cancelled and will be made up	
4 (October 3)	Discussion Session 1: Harman’s Relativism	1 <sup>st</sup> paper due
5 (October 10)	Wong’s Moral Relativism 1: The Idea of Moral Ambivalence and Constraints on Moralities	Wong 2006: Chapters 1-2
(October 17)	Public Holiday	
6 (October 24)	Wong’s Moral Relativism 2: Between Internalism and Externalism	Williams 1981, McDowell 1998, Wong 2006: chapter 7
(October 31)	Class cancelled; to be made up	
7 (November 7)	Wong’s Moral Relativism 4: The Value of Accommodation	Wong 2006: Chapter 9
8 (November 14)	Discussion session 2	2 <sup>nd</sup> paper due
9 (November 21)	Zhuangzi’s Patient Relativism 1: Patient Relativism as a Benign Version of Relativism	Huang 2014, Huang forthcoming (Wong 2014)
10 (November 28)	Zhuangzi’s Patient Relativism 2: As a Copper Rule and as an ethics of difference	Huang 1995; 2010a (see also Huang 2010c, 2005)
11 (December 5) (made up class)	Zhuangzi’s Patient Relativism 4: As a Virtue Ethics.	Huang 2015, 2010b
12 (December 12)	Discussion 3: Patient Relativism	

(made-up class)		
December 17		The longer paper due

### **Academic honesty and plagiarism**

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.