ASIANetwork Exchange
A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts

Editorial

How to Cite: McCarthy, E, Trivedi, L, Kalmanson, L and Mattice, S 2016 Notes from the Editors. *ASIANetwork Exchange*, 23(2), pp. 83–90, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/ane.238

Published: 19 July 2016

ASIANetwork Exchange
A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts

Erin McCarthy, Lisa Trivedi, Leah Kalmanson and Sarah Mattice 'Notes from the Editors' (2016) 23(2), pp. 83–90 *ASIANetwork Exchange*, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/ane.238

EDITORIAL

Notes from the Editors

Erin McCarthy[1], Lisa Trivedi[2], Leah Kalmanson[3] and Sarah Mattice[3]

[1] Editor, St. Lawrence University, US

[2] Editor, Hamilton College, US

[3] Editor, Drake University, US

Corresponding author: Erin McCarthy (editors@asianetworkexchange.org)

We are thrilled to publish this issue on Teaching Comparative Philosophy. The guest editors, Leah Kalmanson (Drake University) and Sarah Mattice (University of North Florida) were incredibly easy to work with and professional throughout the process, for which we are very grateful. The issue that they have put together will be of great interest to our members who do any kind of comparative work, not just philosophers, for, as they pointed out in their proposal, "The theme of Teaching Comparative Philosophy is relevant to many educators concerned with teaching about Asian cultures broadly understood, as comparative philosophy is an intrinsically interdisciplinary field drawing on work not only in Philosophy, but also in Asian Studies, Religious Studies, History, Political Science, Geography, Art, and Post-colonial Studies." We know you will enjoy the issue!

Erin McCarthy and Lisa Trivedi, Editors

Teaching Comparative Philosophy

Leah Kalmanson and Sarah Mattice, Editors

Introduction: The Rewards and Challenges of Teaching Comparative Philosophy in the Undergraduate Classroom

The articles in this special issue on teaching comparative philosophy are selections from papers presented at the inaugural meeting of the Society for Teaching Comparative Philosophy (STCP) at the University of North Florida in February of 2014.[1] As a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary endeavor, comparative philosophy presents

[1] This meeting was made possible with generous support from the Florida Blue Center for Ethics at the University of North Florida, the UNF Asia Council, the Drake University Center for the Humanities, and Drake's Office of the Provost.

unique pedagogical challenges. The STCP formed in 2013 with the goals of providing educators in our field with pedagogical resources, furthering our field's contributions to the scholarship of teaching and learning, and promoting the inclusion of global and multicultural perspectives in philosophy and religion classrooms at the undergraduate level.[2]

Comparative Philosophy in the Undergraduate Institutional Setting

In general, comparative philosophy can be defined in terms of cross-cultural philosophical dialogue, bringing Western philosophical traditions into dialogue with texts and traditions from outside the West. As such, comparative philosophy frequently crosses the disciplinary boundaries between philosophy and religion, especially in the undergraduate classroom setting. Scholars trained in comparative philosophy often work in religion departments or teach classes on the religious traditions of Asia. One might claim that our courses veer toward the "theological," loosely speaking, in the sense that we are working with religious texts and traditions to ask deeply philosophical questions about the nature of reality, moral truth, and meaning in life.

This disciplinary mix often translates poorly into the undergraduate context. For example, we may find ourselves teaching Introduction to Buddhism and assigning too much philosophy to students who were expecting a course in religious studies. Or, we may find ourselves teaching Introduction to Philosophy and assigning too much material in religious studies to students who were expecting a course in logic, metaphysics, and epistemology. Strategies for addressing these various dilemmas will differ depending on each teacher's specific institutional setting, but the STCP provides a space for conversation and exchange on such shared pedagogical concerns.

---

[2] Our founding members and current officers are Sarah Mattice (University of North Florida), Aaron Creller (University of North Florida), and Leah Kalmanson (Drake University). You can learn more about us at the website stcp.weebly.com or follow our public group on Facebook.

Comparative Philosophy and Pedagogical Practices

Pedagogical challenges in the comparative philosophy classroom tend to fall into three main categories: disciplinary methods, course organization, and concerns over Eurocentrism and coloniality. As mentioned above, issues of disciplinary methods and course organization raise foundational questions about what to teach and how to teach it. These foundational questions are especially thorny in light of the issues of Eurocentrism and coloniality that are intrinsic to comparative philosophical projects. Even *naming* our classes—that is, advertising to students what the course will be "about"—can initiate complicated conversations regarding cultural representation and appropriation. As a way to frame the specific questions addressed in the articles that follow, I will briefly introduce three such issues here.

Issue 1: Philosophy or Religion?

In the East Asian context, for example, the compounds for "philosophy" (哲学) and "religion" (宗教) were translated into Japanese in the Mid-1800s and from there entered Chinese. These translations, which required either the development of neologisms or the repurposing of existing vocabulary, happened in a specific colonial context (European and American imperialist agendas in the Asia-Pacific) and through the lens of Eurocentric scholarly theories and methods (the early days of religious studies and the emerging category of "world religions").[3] Together, the categories of philosophy and religion provide a schematic for parsing traditions such as Buddhism and Daoism. This schematic does not reflect the preexisting, indigenous categorizations for scholarly, ritual, and contemplative practices (the various uses of 教, 家, and so forth), and does not adequately represent East Asian traditions as many of us strive to teach them in the classroom. The question we face is whether terms such as "philosophy" and "religion" constitute acceptable shorthand, or whether they indeed enact a problematic projection of Eurocentric, value-laden categorizations onto non-European traditions and texts.

---

[3] For example, see works such as Tomoko Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (2005), and Jason Ānanda Josephson's *The Invention of Religion in Japan* (2012).

Issue 2: Confucianism or Ruism?

Related to the first question is the issue of naming these specific traditions. The word "Confucianism," for example, does not map precisely onto the Chinese term *rujia* (儒家), meaning the "scholarly lineage" or, perhaps more simply, "scholarship," but with a special emphasis on the refined self-cultivation of the scholar who is proficient not only in textual study and empirical investigations but also in poetry, music, and ritual. The term Confucianism is associated with European scholarship in the late 1800s, a time during which so-called religions were categorized by their so-called founders and "sacred" texts. The use of the word Ruism, a better approximation of the Chinese, helps to reorient discussion of the tradition outside of the philosophy-religion schematic. This leads to another question regarding how to give students a sense of Ruism's historical development within contemporary philosophy's usual curriculum and vocabulary.

Issue 3: Hegelianism or History?

I am using "Hegelianism" somewhat loosely and derisively to refer to a Eurocentric and teleological model for historical development, in which the arc of "world history" begins in "the East" but comes to fruition in "the West," and where Africa and the Americas are not even counted.[4] Although many of us today would likely resist this naïve picture of history, traces of such Hegelianism appear at the curricular level in most philosophy departments. For example, classes focusing on Western discourses are generally divided into historical periods, as reflected in the titles of standard course offerings such as Ancient Philosophy, Medieval Philosophy, and Modern Philosophy. Turn to a department's non-Western offerings (if there are any) and you will likely find courses such as Chinese Philosophy, Indian Philosophy, Confucianism, Buddhist Philosophy, and so forth. In other words, the curriculum often reinforces

[4] For a discussion of how this model of history has impacted current practices in academic philosophy, see Peter K. J. Park's *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon* (2014).

for students the idea that Europe is marked by important historical developments while Asian traditions are monolithic and ahistorical.

Given all this, appropriately named classes in Chinese traditions would be, for example, "Warring States Ruism" or "Song-Dynasty Sanjiao Debates." Such courses would, of course, be nearly incomprehensible to many American students scanning the catalogue for semester offerings. Again, we face the question of whether less appropriate names for classes are acceptable compromises or not. Against this general backdrop concerning issues of Eurocentrism in comparative philosophy, our contributors offer both critical and constructive strategies for navigating a range of specific challenges in the undergraduate classroom.

Article Summaries

Our first contribution, by Jeremy Henkel (Wofford College), is "Should Introductory Comparative Philosophy Courses Be Structured Around Topics or Traditions?" Henkel addresses a persistent problem for comparative philosophy teachers: Do we organize our syllabi around topics (ethics, epistemology, and so forth) or around traditions (Greek philosophy, Buddhism, African philosophy)? On the one hand, our choices for topics are dominated by the terms of discourse set by the Western canon. On the other, our use of traditions too often obscures the diversity that makes neat categories such as "Buddhism" questionable. Henkel presents a variety of approaches to mediate these problems, ultimately deciding in favor of the traditions format.

Our next contribution, by Andrew Lambert (College of Staten Island), is "The Challenge of Teaching Chinese Philosophy: Some Thoughts on Method." Lambert offers an alternative perspective to the problems brought up in Henkel's article, namely, the issue of using the topics format to organize class material. Instead of selecting topics taken from common themes in Western discourses, Lambert suggests a variety of organizational strategies based on themes such as tradition, ritual, and family, which are rooted in Chinese material but flexible enough to organize a broad range of philosophical content.

Continuing the conversation on organizing class content, Aaron Creller (University of North Florida) considers the challenges faced by nonspecialists in

comparative philosophy in his contribution, "Introducing the World: Making Time for Islamic and Chinese Material alongside the Western Canon." He addresses several familiar objections to incorporating non-Western material into standing philosophy courses (i.e., the view that the material is, indeed, not included in the category philosophy, or the worry that there simply is not enough time to cover such material). Creller answers these objections, emphasizing that what we today call the "Western" canon has historically been shaped by a plurality of cultures. He concludes with several sample course modules, designed to help nonspecialists incorporate sessions on Islamic and Chinese philosophy into introductory classes.

Sarah Mattice (University of North Florida) explores questions of cultural representation in "But Do They Know It's February in China? And Other Questions of Authority and Culture in the Comparative Classroom." Mattice outlines the difficult position in which comparative philosophy teachers at times find themselves i.e., occupying the role of cultural representative for a variety of cultures and traditions. She recounts various questions students have asked her in classroom settings, each of which help problematize students' assumptions about the material they are studying as well as teachers' responsibilities in unearthing and countering these underlying prejudices. Mattice concludes with several pedagogical strategies to support teachers negotiating such cross-cultural conversations.

Finally, Paul Carelli (University of Northern Florida) reminds us that the problems that may appear unique to teaching comparative philosophy are also relevant to teaching the so-called Western tradition. In "Teaching Ancient Greek Philosophy as a Non-Western Tradition," Carelli points out that classical Greek culture is, in many ways, as remote from us today as any contemporary culture is from another. He offers strategies for reinvigorating our approach to teaching Socrates in the undergraduate classroom by viewing Greek material through the theories and methods of comparative philosophy, with renewed attention to cultural, historical, and linguistic context.

In addition to the articles here, the first STCP meeting also included a presentation by Amy Donahue (Kennesaw State University) titled "Sidestepping Colonialist

Pitfalls in Comparative Philosophy Classes"[5] and my own talk "What's in a Name? Contextualizing the Colonial History of Comparative Philosophy for Students," both of which problematized the issues of Eurocentrism and coloniality discussed in this introduction. The meeting featured two keynote presentations structured as interactive workshops. The first was titled "Contemplative Pedagogies For Comparative Philosophy: A Hands-on Workshop" by Erin McCarthy (St. Lawrence University). McCarthy provided an overview of contemplative education practices that help students engage in experiential learning, critical self-reflection, and close reading of texts. The second was by Ben Lukey (Uehiro Academy for Philosophy and Ethics in Education) on "The Activity of Philosophy: What 'Philosophy' for Children Can Offer Comparative Philosophy." Lukey discussed his work in the field of "philosophy for children," or p4c, and offered classroom strategies to help build community, foster students' sense of intellectual safety in the classroom, and allow for student-directed discussion and exploration. This first meeting was followed by a second conference at Drake University (Des Moines, Iowa) in July 2015,[6] and in 2016 the STCP is sponsoring sessions at the annual conferences of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy and the American Association of Philosophy Teachers. More information on the society's activities can be found at stcp.weebly.com.

Leah Kalmanson, Editor

Competing Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Author Information

Leah Kalmanson is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Drake University. This special issue includes papers from the inaugural meeting of the Society for Teaching Comparative Philosophy at the University of North

[5] The material from Donahue's talk will be published in the article "For the Cowherds: Coloniality and Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy," forthcoming in *Philosophy East and West* (April 2016).

[6] The second meeting was made possible with generous support from Drake University's Center for the Humanities and the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion, located at Wabash College and fully funded by Lilly Endowment Inc.

Florida in 2014, which was made possible with generous support from the Florida Blue Center for Ethics at UNF, the UNF Asia Council, the Drake University Center for the Humanities, and Drake's Office of the Provost.

Bibliography

Donahue, A 2016 (April forthcoming) For the Cowherds: Coloniality and Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy. *Philosophy East and West*, 66(2). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pew.2016.0038

Josephson, J Ā 2012 *The Invention of Religion in Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226412351.001.0001

Masuzawa, T 2005 *The Invention of World Religions: Or How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226922621.001.0001

Park, P K J 2014 *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy: Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon*. Albany: SUNY Press.

How to cite this article: McCarthy, E, Trivedi, L, Kalmanson, L and Mattice, S 2016 Notes from the Editors. *ASIANetwork Exchange*, 23(2), pp. 83–90, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/ane.238

Published: 19 July 2016