COURSE SYLLABUS
PHILOSOPHY 192A: COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY SEMINAR
Fall, 2004

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COURSE CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION:
A seminar on a philosophical theme. Intensive study of an important philosophical theme or issue: Comparative Philosophy, Spring, 2003.
Note: May be repeated for credit provided the seminar topic is not repeated. Prerequisite: 6 units of philosophy or instructor permission.

AMIR’S FABLE

There is an old fable which tells that Truth and Falsehood went for a swim together, leaving their clothes on shore. Falsehood coming out of the water first, puts on Truth’s clothes. Truth, being what it is, absolutely refused to wear Falsehood’s clothes, thus remained naked. Ever since then, Falsehood, appearing as Truth, has been accepted as Truth, while Truth still awaits to be seen.
CHUANG TZU’S TALE

At the Gorge of Lu, the great waterfall plunges for thousands of feet, its spray visible for miles. In the churning waters below, no living creature can be seen. One day, K‘ung Fu-Tzu, was standing at a distance from the pool’s edge, when he saw an old man being tossed about in the turbulent water. He called to his disciples, and together they ran to rescue the victim. But by the time they reached the water, the old man had come out onto the bank and was walking along, singing to himself.

K‘ung Fu-Tzu hurried up to him. ‘You would have to be a ghost to survive that,’ he said, ‘but you seem to be a man, instead. What secret power do you have?’ ‘Nothing special,’ the old man replied. ‘I began to learn while young, and grew up practicing it. Now I am certain of success. I go down with the water and come up with the water. I follow it and forget myself. I survive because I don’t struggle against the water’s superior power. That’s all.’

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

Learning occurs only in the presence of contrasts. Our Lebenswelt (life-world) is a dynamic matrix of contrasts. Contrasts compel attention, sustained attention generates reflection, reflection coupled with wonder creates the quest for understanding so that one may live better. These are the roots of Philosophy in conscious human experience.

But Philosophy always occurs in the matrix of a civilization and culture, which creates and exemplifies historical and institutional patterns of action and thought. Each culture constructs its distinct Weltanschauung (world-outlook) and Lebensanschauung (life-approach). A civilization’s philosophers and sages both create and reflect these Anschauungen as they ponder human experience in order to discover and disclose inhabitable views of reality.
Different civilizations embodying distinct and often dissimilar philosophies are the source of boundaries. Historical, cultural, political, religious, and philosophical borders thwart crossovers. Interpreting across boundaries appears to be an errand for fools. But folly is not solely the province of fools.

Comparative Philosophy essays the daunting task of positioning discrete philosophies and their respective cultural contexts in order to scrutinize similarities and differences. Comparative Philosophical inquiry must carry out this assignment while simultaneously interrogating its own assumptions about Philosophy, the comparative venture, and the comparisons themselves.

Comparativist Raimon Panikkar calls us to meet the challenge in “What Is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?” a provocative essay, which you shall read in Interpreting Across the Boundaries: New Essays In Comparative Philosophy. “Only those persons who . . . have existentially crossed the borders of at least two cultures and are at home in either, shall be able first to understanding and then to translate. . . .If we want to interpret another basically different philosophy we will have to attend the school of that philosophy and immerse ourselves in its universe of discourse as far as is possible for us.”

This seminar not only sends us back to school; it draws us into the exciting domain of a discipline without which philosophical education is deficient. Students are invited to embrace the discipline. Embracing means entertaining and cultivating diverse world views and philosophies, including those expressed in the Way of Tao, The Way of the Empiricist, the Way of the Buddha, the Way of the Materialist, the Way of the Hindu, the Way of the Sufi, and the Way of K’ung Fu-Tzu.

ASSIGNMENTS:

You will be expected to read all of the books and materials assigned for the seminar. Ideally, one take-home essay will be given for each book. Each essay must be a minimum of 1500 words. You will be expected to undertake an in-depth analysis of the major comparative and philosophical themes in each book.
TEXTS:

Sobonfu E. Some                     Falling Out of Grace and
                                     The Spirit of Intimacy

H. H. Dalai Lama & Company:        Sleeping, Dreaming &
                                     Dying: An Exploration of
                                     Consciousness with the
                                     Dalai Lama

Nolan Jacobson                     Buddhism: The Religion
                                     of Analysis

Gerald Larson (ed.)                 Interpreting Across the
                                     Boundaries: Essays In
                                     Comparative Philosophy

Toshihiko Izutsu                   Creation and the Timeless
                                     Order of Being

Krishnamurti, J.                   Freedom From The Known

ATTENDANCE:

It goes without saying, though I say it (ask yourself why I do) that your
attendance at all class sessions is crucial. My pedagogical
philosophy and methodology are embodied in the maxim: “Allow to
happen what wants to happen relative to the totality of situation
(“situation” encompasses all that is ingredient in the occurrence of an
event, most of which is not available to intellect). This means that the
tight orchestration of the seminar, which is not obvious in the
apparent loose structure our sessions, arises only in a synthesis of
the parts, parts of a whole which is always greater than its parts and
is never reducible to those parts.

PREPARATION:

You must keep up with the reading. Comparative Philosophy will
demand more of your time and attention than anything you’ve yet
encountered. Most people find they need to read the material several
times before they have comprehended it. After the first week there will be daily interrogations of randomly selected people on the reading material to determine currency in preparation.

COLLABORATION:

You are free to work together on questions and essays outside of class. Use each other as a source of ideas, but always do your own writing.

FORM OF SUBMITTED WORK:

Each essay must be typed, double-spaced in 14-point type with one-inch margins. Essays may be submitted by email only when there is a request to do attended by a good reason, but they must reach me before or on the due date. Please submit to singprof@foothill.net. Email submissions must also be in 14-point type.

DUE DATES AND LATE POLICY:

Essays will be due on announced due date. If you’re late, you’d better have a good reason. There will be a minimum of five essays due this semester.

GRADING:

Essays will be graded on the basis of two criteria: Form and content. Matters of form include grammar, spelling, punctuation, clarity, and organization. Matters of content include: Textual accuracy, thoroughness and overall quality of thought. Each essay will receive a letter grade. Your final grade will be determined by the essay grades.

WRITING COMPONENT:

Your writing will be evaluated and graded. I will note errors and omissions as they occur in the text of the essay.

WEEKLY COURSE OUTLINE:
I am not providing a week by week outline because this is a seminar and because I value flexibility above all. I won’t know your backgrounds, needs, blindesses, and orientations immediately, so I can’t tell you with any precision where we’ll be at any given time. However, I want you to begin with the above-cited Raimon Panikkar essay in *Interpreting Across the Boundaries: New Essays in Comparative Philosophy*, “What Is Comparative Philosophy Comparing?” Other essays in this volume will be assigned from time to time, but I want you to read all of them by the end of semester. The second reading task will be a quick first read through of Sobonfu Some’s *Fall Out of Grace* and *The Spirit of Intimacy*. The third reading assignment will be *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying: An Exploration of Consciousness With The Dalai Lama*. Do a quick read of the entire book first. Then we’ll move to Krishnamurti’s *Freedom From The Known*. Toshihiko Izutsu’s *Creation and The Timeless Order of Being* will be our concluding assignment. You’ll be writing essays on each of these books.

Professor Joseph Wu’s *Clarification and Enlightenment: Essays in Comparative Philosophy* will be on reserve at the library. I will try to reserve multiple copies. I strongly urge you to consult and read the essays. Professor Wu was my colleague and mentor in Comparative Philosophy before he retired from the department several years ago. I will give you copies of my Chinese Philosophy syllabus to acquaint you with some of his ideas as well as introduce you to Chinese Philosophy.

**CAVEAT:**

This syllabus is subject to change at the instructor’s discretion.