Liu Boming Lectures at Nanjing University

Wang Yangming and Contemporary Moral Philosophy

Yong HUANG

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

**Introduction**

This course examines Wang Yangming’s potential contribution to contemporary moral philosophy. It adopts the comparative, philosophical, and textual methodologies, in their unique senses, all at once. First, unlike standard comparative studies that typically compare two philosophers, texts, or concepts from two philosophical traditions, this course, focused on Wang Yangming in the Chinese side, relates him not to any single Western philosopher but engages him in a dialogue with a number of contemporary Western moral philosophers in the analytic tradition. Moreover, unlike most comparative studies that aim to identify similarities and differences between the objects under comparison, this course explores what interesting things Wang Yangming has to say on these topics.

So, second, this course is a philosophically oriented one, in the sense that its main purpose is not merely to explain what Wang and/or some contemporary Western moral philosophers have to say on related issues. Instead, without assuming the superiority of the former to the latter, in each lecture, the PI identifies a central issue on which the PI believes the representative views in contemporary Western moral philosophy are problematic in one sense or another and Wang’s view can provide a better alternative.

Third, this course is also a textually oriented one, especially in the exposition of Wang’s philosophy. There have been two ways of doing comparative philosophy, philosophical and textual. However, these two methods are often considered to be incompatible: textual studies are not interested in whether the ideas are philosophically appealing, while philosophical studies are not so much concerned about the accurate understanding of the historical texts. This course, however, attempts to combine these two methods. Since the philosophical approach adopted in this course aims to show how Wang can contribute to contemporary moral philosophy, it is important that this study be based on a thorough and solid textual study of Wang’s works.

**Schedule of Lectures and Assigned Readings**

1. Knowing-to: A Third Type of Knowledge in Addition to Knowing-that and Knowing-how?

Reading: “Knowing-that, Knowing-how, or Knowing-to: Wang Yangming’s Conception of Moral Knowledge.” *Journal of Philosophical Research* 42: 65-94.

1. Knowing-to: Why Is Besire not Bizarre?

Reading: “Belief, Desire, and Besire: Slote and Wang Yangming on Moral Motivation.” In Yong Huang, ed., *Slote Encountering Chinese Philosophy*, London: Bloomsbury, pp. 81-98.

1. Empathy: Why the University Love Should Be Graded

Reading: “Confucian Virtue Environmental Ethics,” in *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Willis Jenkins, Routledge: 52-59.

1. Empathy: Is Empathy with the Devil Possible?

Reading: “Empathy with ‘Devils’: Wang Yangming’s Contribution to Contemporary Moral Philosophy,” in *Moral and Intellectual Virtues in Western and Chinese Philosophy*, edited by Michael Mi, Michael Slote, and Ernest Sosa, Routledge, 2018, 214-234.

1. Luck and Responsibility: Is Moral Luck Really an Oxymoron or a Paradox?

Reading: “Moral Luck and Moral Responsibility: Wang Yangming on the Confucian Problem of Evil.” In Ming-dong Gu, ed. *Why Traditional Chinese Philosophy Still Matters.* Routledge. (2018). Pp. 68-81.

1. Agent based-moral realism: How Can the Normative Be Objective?

Reading: “Two Defences of Moral Expressivism: From Simon Blackburn’s Quasi-Realism to Wang Yangming’s Agent-Based Moral Realism.” In Yong Huang, ed., *Simon Blackburn Encountering Chinese Philosophy*, Bloomsbury.

**Course Requirements**

1. Students are supposed to attend every class session;
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 classroom discussions by raising questions and making comments regarding either the assigned readings or the instructor’s lectures or fellow students’ comments;
4. Students are supposed to write one short paper of 2000 English words or 300 Chinese characters (due date to be announced)

**Guidelines of 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 alternative position, or provide your own arguments, and explain how your position and/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.