Philosophy PhD course Prof. William Franke Spring semester 2014 Office: P207 Program in Philosophy and Religious Studies williamfranke@umac.mo University of Macao

  **Intercultural Philosophy of the Unsayable**

This course will explore apophatic (negative) thought about the limits of language and the break-down of conceptual thinking as a location for comparative philosophy, or for thinking philosophically across cultures. The “unsayable” that different traditions tend to acknowledge as a limit to the reach of reason and the word paradoxically can form a common ground (or abyss) enabling unexpected convergences and mutual understanding across some of the widest gaps and most intractable differences between cultures. The question of universality has been fundamental to philosophy since its inception in ancient Greece, and it comes back in a new guise today in our multi-cultural context. If reason is the principle of universality that has inspired the mainstream of Western philosophy from its origins to the present, it is now imperative to consider whether the negation of reason or the *beyond* of reason—precisely what reason cannot grasp and say, indeed, the unsayable—might not be the basis for a truly universal philosophy today, one that could bring the world’s many diverse cultures into communication with one another. In acknowledging the limits of their methods and resources, different philosophies or modes of thought or wisdom might be rendered capable also of acknowledging one another as well and of learning from the particular talents and peculiar experience that is sedimented into each different cultural tradition—whether of speculation, or contemplation, or analysis.

As a basis for this exploration, one primary reference will be Western apophatic tradition from Plato to postmodernism. I am therefore setting as a basic text my 2-volume work constructing the field and elaborating a theory of apophasis with selections from the most significant historical and contemporary sources:

*On What Cannot Be Said*:

*Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*

 Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

Edited with Theoretical and Critical Essays by William Franke Vol. I: Classic Formulations Vol. II: Modern and Contemporary Transformations

It will help get us off to a running start if the seminar participants have read the general introductions to each of these volumes as preparation for the course when we begin to meet in mid-February.

Another basic text that I expect us to work with in detail in order to set up comparative study specifically with Chinese classical wisdom is:

François Jullien, *Le détour et l’accès: Stratégies du sens en Chine, en Grèce* (Paris: Grasset, 1995). Trans. Sophie Hawkes as *Detour and Access: Strategies of Meaning in China and Greece* (New York: Zone Books, 2004).

We will add further texts in the course of the semester, some of which may be suggested by specific interests of the participants. I mention the two above as common resources for us to draw on throughout the course. Familiarity with them will be our common basis.

The Unsayable can be the fulcrum for an ethical and political philosophy (in the manners of Benjamin, Foucault, and Agamben) as well as for an approach to the theory of knowledge (Derrida). It comprises aesthetics and culture and may be a necessary component of an intercultural philosophy adequate to our moment in history. Some selections from Badiou, Agamben, and Zizek will also be introduced in pursuit of the question of a new understanding of universality.

Bibliography

Eliot Deutsch, *Culture and Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives* (Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 1991)

David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Anticipating China: Thinking through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995)

David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth, and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

Ames, “Paranomasia: A Confucian Way of Making Meaning,” in *Confucius Now: Contemporary Encounters with the Analects,* ed. David Jones (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1992), 37-48.

Ames and Hall, *Focusing the Familiar: A Translation and Philosophical Interpretation of the Zhongyong*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001.

Robert W. Smid, *Methodologies of Comparative Philosophy: The Pragmatist and Process Traditions*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009.

A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China*. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *Unreason Within Reason: Essays on the Outskirts of Rationality* *China*. La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1992.

Chad Hansen, “Ancient Chinese Theories of Language,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 2/3 (1975); 245-83;

\_\_\_\_\_. *Language and Logic in Ancient China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983).

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Daost Theory of Chinese Thought* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1992)

**Requirements**

The seminar will be organized as a workshop around the participants’ research projects. I will present my own project: “Apophatic Paths from Europe to China: Regions without Borders,” and in the course of the semester we will examine each student’s own project. Thus an oral presentation and a research paper will be required. MA students should write 15-page research papers and PhD students 25-page papers.