

Comparative Philosophy I: Classical Readings

Instructor: Li-fan Lee, PhD Student leelf@vuw.leidenuniv.nl

Final Exam

Please read the instructions carefully; contact the instructor for questions

Date, Time & Submission:

- Friday June 9, 10 AM ~ 5 PM
- Online submission in PDF format on Brightspace through:
Exam Related → Final Exam Submission
- You may revise and upload an updated version to overwrite your previous submission *until 5 PM*, after which the portal will be closed.

Rules:

- Please write down your **full name** and **student number**, and your **essay title/topic**.
- Pick **ONE** of the topics and write **an essay of 1,000 words** (with a 10% margin).
Please respect the word limit; this is part of the training.
Include a simple word count (e.g. 987 words) at the end of your essay; count the main body of the essay (and footnotes if you have any), excluding title, name, appendix, etc.
- Key grading criteria: *Thoughtfulness in your discussion*
 - Consult the basic academic writing format that was introduced during the course and see what elements might be needed in a thoughtful discussion. You do not need to follow that format strictly, but feel free to practice by imitating.
 - With that said, please try to announce a “**thesis statement**”, i.e. what you are going to argue for in your essay, in the very beginning or the first paragraph of your essay. (In practice, you might actually write your thesis statement *last* after finishing your essay and figuring out your whole argument.)
 - *Remember:* You may argue that a topic is so complicated that you cannot decide on a definite position. In this case, your essay needs to show why it is so complicated and why a number of opinions are worthy of consideration but you find none of them satisfactory. *In fact, you are encouraged to discuss in this manner than simply arguing for a fixed opinion.*
- **Warning**
 - **Plagiarism and use of AI-generated content will NOT be tolerated and you will instantly fail this course.** If you have difficulty completing the exam, contact the instructor directly. I am always willing to help.

Topic Options:

In your essay, you must address the guiding questions I provide, but not limited to them.

1. The Sage and the Racists

If someone says: “The ‘investigation of things’ in the *Great Learning* and the virtue of ‘carrying all things’ in the *Book of Change* only apply to what is worthy of understanding and carrying, and this does not include, for example, racists. Racism is wrong, and racists do not deserve to be understood or taken care of.”

Do you agree? According to the *Great Learning*, what might a sage-king think about this? And what might be a sage-king’s attitude towards racists? (Keep in mind: While racism is a kind of belief or attitude, racists are nevertheless people.) Discuss in your essay.

2. Cultivation and Education

If someone says: “Virtue or character cultivation is a personal responsibility and should happen at home or in private life; either one’s parents/guardians or oneself should be responsible for this. Education in schools, especially higher education in universities and beyond, should instead focus only on transmitting knowledge and training skills. Virtue cultivation is not a matter of professional education.”

Do you agree? What might the *Great Learning* suggest? Would you agree with the *Great Learning*? Discuss in your essay.

3. The Crying Sage

If someone says: “Shun is not a great person, at least not according to the *Great Learning*. He did not make his father, stepmother, and half-brother better persons, and his own son also lacked virtues, while according to the *Great Learning*, regulating one’s family and the ability of doing so is one of the fundamental steps in attaining greatness.”

Do you agree? Do you think this is a correct understanding of the *Great Learning*? Do you think “regulating one’s family” (no matter what that means) is necessary for a person to be “great”? Please discuss in your essay.

4. The Power of Art

Music, movie, literature, and all forms of arts can not only express the creator’s feelings, arouse the audience’s feelings, but also present a situation and/or important human experience and make it accessible and comprehensible to the audience. We learned that the ancient Zhou regime in China even sent out officers to collect local songs as references and reminders for rulers. Suppose you are a curator of art like those officers. Which song, poem, movie, or art work do you think is important for people to know and understand, and why? Could the *Great Learning* support your selection and

reasoning? Pick one of such an art work and discuss in your essay.

(If possible, include that work of art in an appendix or a link to it in a reference list. This does not count towards your word limit.)