



# GLOBALISING PHILOSOPHY SYMPOSIUM

**A one-day conference to celebrate the inauguration of the new BA in Global Philosophies at the University of Kent.**

What does it mean to talk of Philosophy as a global phenomenon? Is philosophy a western enterprise? How does recognition of intellectual traditions beyond the West transform philosophical debate and perhaps the nature of philosophy itself? This event is open to all and celebrates the introduction of a new undergraduate degree in Global Philosophies at the University of Kent, which will be accepting its first students in September 2019.

**Friday 14 June 9.30-17.30**

University of  
**Kent**

School of  
European Culture  
and Languages

# SCHEDULE

**9.30-9.45am: Welcome (Professor Richard King, University of Kent)**

## **SESSION 1: EAST ASIAN PERSPECTIVES**

**Chair: Richard King**

**9.45-10.45am: “Learning from Chinese Philosophy”**

**Bryan van Norden, Vassar College and Yale-NUS College, Singapore**

### **Abstract**

When Europeans first encountered Chinese Confucians, Daoists, and Buddhists, they immediately recognized them as serious philosophers. However, this attitude changed due to the influence of imperialism and pseudo-scientific racism, so that (beginning with Kant) Chinese philosophy was dismissed and banned from academic philosophy in the West. Recently, works like my *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto* have challenged the status quo and demanded that we return to the cosmopolitan ideal of multicultural philosophy. This lecture provides several examples of the profound and distinct philosophical debates that existed in China on issues such as consequentialism, human nature, ethical egoism, relativism, and skepticism.

### **About the speaker**



Bryan W. Van Norden is Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple Professor at Yale-NUS College in Singapore. He is also James Monroe Taylor Chair in Philosophy at Vassar College, USA, and Chair Professor in Philosophy in the School of Philosophy at Wuhan University in China. A recipient of Fulbright, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Mellon fellowships, Van Norden has been honoured as one of The Best 300 Professors in the US by The Princeton Review. Van Norden is author, editor, or translator of nine books on Chinese and comparative philosophy, including *Introduction to Classical Chinese*

*Philosophy* (2011), *Readings in Later Chinese Philosophy: Han to the 20th*

*Century* (2014, with Justin Tiwald), *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (2nd ed., 2005, with P.J. Ivanhoe), and most recently *Taking Back Philosophy: A Multicultural Manifesto* (2017). His hobbies are poker (he has played in the World Series of Poker in Las Vegas) and video games.

### **10.45-11am: Break**

### **11am-12pm: “Globalising Medical Philosophy: Some East Asian Perspectives” (Leslie de Vries, University of Kent)**

#### **Abstract**

Many proponents of East Asian medicine praise the ancient and non-Western “holistic” philosophy underpinning their practice for offering a harmonious and gentle approach to healing, which is very different from bio-medicine. Skeptics, on the other hand, categorically denounce these traditional forms of medicine as being “unscientific”. Zooming in on an episode in history before the hegemony of bio-medicine, I aim to add extra layers of nuance and complexity to discussions of what medicine is or ought to be. In this talk, I will focus on how three eighteenth-century East Asian physicians, Xu Dachun (1693-1771), Yoshimasu Tōdō (1702-1773) and Lê Hữu Trác (1720?-1791), reflected on metaphysics, epistemology and ethics. Contrasting the divergent views of a Chinese, a Japanese and a Vietnamese physician, I show how a serious engagement with pre-modern, non-Western actors contributes to globalising the philosophy of medicine.

#### **About the speaker**



Leslie de Vries is a Lecturer in East Asian Studies at the University of Kent. Previously, he taught and did doctoral research at the Ghent University, where he earned his PhD degree in 2012. He was also a Research Fellow in the “Beyond Tradition: Ways of Knowing and Styles of Practice in East Asian Medicines, 1000 to the Present” project at the University of Westminster. Leslie is particularly interested in cosmology, views on the body, medical therapy and self-cultivation in East Asia. He is the author of the forthcoming book *The Thread that Runs*

*through Medicine: A Style of Practice in Seventeenth-Century China* (Berghahn) and several other publications on medicine in China and Vietnam.

**12.00-12.45pm: Lunch**

## **SESSION 2: INDIAN AND AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES**

**Chair: Dr. Leslie de Vries**

**12.45-1.45pm: “Moving Beyond the ‘Philosophy vs. Religion’ Trope in the Study of Indian Philosophical Thought” (Richard King, University of Kent)**

### **Abstract**

This talk will explore the hypothesis that it is the cognitive separation of something called “philosophy” from something labelled “religion” which has facilitated a form of intellectual apartheid within the global history of ideas by privileging (a particular construal of) Euro-American civilization, or “the West” as it is often named, as the putative home (and yardstick) of philosophy as a whole. This largely uninterrogated and embedded secularist assumption will be challenged through a brief consideration of scholarship calling the distinction into question and also by way of a discussion of the claim that Indian traditions of philosophy are “more religious” than western ones.

### **About the speaker**



Richard King is Professor of Buddhist and Asian Studies and the Head of Religious Studies at the University of Kent. He has held positions at Stirling, Derby, Glasgow and Vanderbilt universities and has pioneered the development of the new BA in Global Philosophies at Kent. He is the author and editor of six books including, *Early Advaita Vedānta and Buddhism* (1995), *Orientalism and Religion* (1999), *Indian Philosophy* (2000), *Selling Spirituality* (with Jeremy Carrette, 2005), *Religion and Violence in South Asia* (with John Hinnells, 2007) and *Religion, Theory and Critique* (2017). A specialist of classical Indian Brahmanical and Buddhist thought, especially the Vedāntic and Mahāyāna traditions, Professor King is also known for his work exploring the implications of postcolonial theory for the study of India.



## **1.45-2.45pm: “Decolonizing Philosophy of Religion: Thinking With West African Indigenous Religions” (Patrice Haynes, Liverpool Hope University)**

### **Abstract**

Increasingly, philosophy of religion is charged with failing to attend to the diversity of religions in the world. Typically, the field is preoccupied with an ahistorical (Christian) theism or the ‘religious turn’ in postmodern philosophy (analytic and continental philosophy of religion respectively). This parochialism conceals the colonial and racist histories that shape the category ‘religion’ and the agenda of philosophy of religion. In this talk, I use the work of Caribbean decolonial theorist Sylvia Wynter to examine the emergence of modern philosophy of religion, showing how it contributes to the invention of what Wynter calls ‘Man’ – namely, European Man as the exemplary human being. I argue that a mandatory task for decolonizing philosophy of religion is re-conceptualizing the human beyond ‘Man’. To this end, the second part of this talk draws on Yoruba cosmology and anthropology in order to develop the idea of an ‘animist humanism’, whereby the human is reconfigured in ways attuned to both African indigenous religions and decolonial thought. In doing so it highlights some of the methodological difficulties that attend efforts to think with what we might call an African cosmo-sense.

### **About the speaker**



Patrice Haynes is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Liverpool Hope University. Her research interests focus primarily on issues in philosophy of religion, particularly as these are reframed by continental, feminist and decolonial philosophies. Her first monograph, titled *Immanent*

*Transcendence: Reconfiguring Materialism in Continental Philosophy*, was published by Bloomsbury in 2012. She is currently undertaking research for her second monograph which aims to challenge the Eurocentric focus of philosophy of religion by considering how a focus on African (particularly West and Southern Africa) indigenous religions can point to the field’s constructive transformation beyond its colonial legacy. She is a co-founder of the Association of Continental Philosophy of Religion.

**2.45-3pm: Coffee/Tea Break**

### **SESSION 3: WESTERN PERSPECTIVES**

**Chair: Richard King**

#### **3-4pm: “Spiritual Exercise, Anthropotechnics and the Imagination of Global Philosophy” (Ward Blanton, University of Kent)**

##### **Abstract**

This presentation will consider the philosophical work of Pierre Hadot and Peter Sloterdijk in their respective advocacies of ‘spiritual exercises’ and the practice of ‘anthropotechnics’ as frames by which to radicalize (perhaps to open up? perhaps to destroy?) a tradition of thought both philosophers gloss as European, Western, and sometimes as modern. In particular I want to articulate the way they both present exercise or practice as a way to think about repetition which links structure and anarchy. With that in mind, how do we evaluate the use and limits of these paradigms to volatilize or disrupt inherited concepts of the global, universal, or all? Does the discipline of global philosophy need to imagine itself as consisting of spiritual exercises, and should we imagine global philosophy as another name for the anthropotechnical turn in the Humanities?

##### **About the speaker**



Ward Blanton is Reader in Biblical Cultures and European Thought at the University of Kent. His books include *A Materialism for the Masses: Saint Paul and the Philosophy of Undying Life* (Columbia); *Displacing Christian Origins: Philosophy, Secularity, and the New Testament* (Chicago); and as co-editor with Hent de Vries, *Paul and the Philosophers* (Fordham). He is currently working on a project tentatively entitled *Hegel's Coffee Machine: Religion, Philosophy, and the Self-dosing Spirit of Capitalism*.

## 4-5pm: “In Praise of Shallowness” (Julian Baggini, University of Kent)

### Abstract

There is always a trade-off between depth and breadth. Contemporary academic philosophy privileges the deep and the narrow over the broad and the wide. I will argue that there is an important need for breadth and that a fear of superficiality has become a hindrance.

### About the speaker



Dr Julian Baggini, honorary research fellow in the Department of Philosophy and honorary graduate of the University of Kent, is a writer and the founding editor of *The Philosopher's Magazine*. He has a PhD on the philosophy of personal identity and is the author of over 20 books including *The Pigs That Want to be Eaten* (Granta, 2010), *The Virtues of the Table* (Granta, 2014) and *The Ego Trip* (Granta, 2012). Julian's most recent book is entitled *How the World Thinks: A Global History of Philosophy* (Granta, 2018). Julian was recently appointed academic director of the Royal Institute of Philosophy.

### 5-5.30pm: Open Forum

General Questions and Discussion: “The Globalisation of Philosophy: Challenges, Opportunities, Perspectives”

Chair: Richard King

# **GLOBALISING PHILOSOPHY /PANEL**

**A public event discussing the general theme of the conference will take place on Saturday 15 June 11am-1pm in the Beaney Museum of Art and Knowledge in Canterbury.**

This event is organised by the Royal Institute of Philosophy. Please contact Dr Todd Mei [T.S.Mei@kent.ac.uk](mailto:T.S.Mei@kent.ac.uk) for further details.

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