Testimonial *Grégory von Boetticher*

Dates of Exchange	01/08/2022 to 04/12/2022
Academic year	2022 / 2023
Name of University	National University of Singapore
City/town, country	Singapore
Leiden study program	B.a. Liberal Arts & Sciences: Global Challenges
Faculty	Governance and Global Affairs

Aim of my exchange

Having planned to do a minor in philosophy or go on exchange during the 5th semester of my Bachelors, program, for quite some time, the aim of the exchange was relatively clear to me. I wanted to explore more philosophy courses, apart from my major in World Politics at Leiden University College, to get a better foundation for my future plans of doing an AI ethics master program.

However, this aim had been little defined in terms of the location/host institution I would attend. After some further deliberation and research, the National University of Singapore (NUS) seemed like just the right place, combining a strong entrepreneurial culture, global economic hub, and innovative research through one of the highest densities of top universities. Moreover, the different cultural setting, to my main experience in Europe and other western countries, was highly intriguing, carrying promise of insights I would hardly be able to gather from exchanging to another institution in a western country.

Academic experience

Given the aim of exploring philosophy, the courses I enrolled in at NUS were all in the department of philosophy, with one exception *International Ethics* in the political science department.

The latter was firmly nested in the study of international relations, however, with a strong focus on the moral philosophical, and applied ethical dimensions of political issues and global challenges. As such, though the course did not directly address AI, it did give a broad overview and the opportunity to discuss the procedure of international cooperation and governance and the philosophy underlying much of the conduct in IR. AI being a chiefly international endeavor and global challenge, the course therefore, helped further my thinking on how its development and implementation might (need to) be addressed through international cooperation and regulation.

As far as the courses in the department of philosophy go, *Moral Philosophy*, *Logic*, and *Science Fiction & Philosophy*, were quite clearly correlated to AI ethics, while *Life, the Universe and Everything* took a broader perspective.
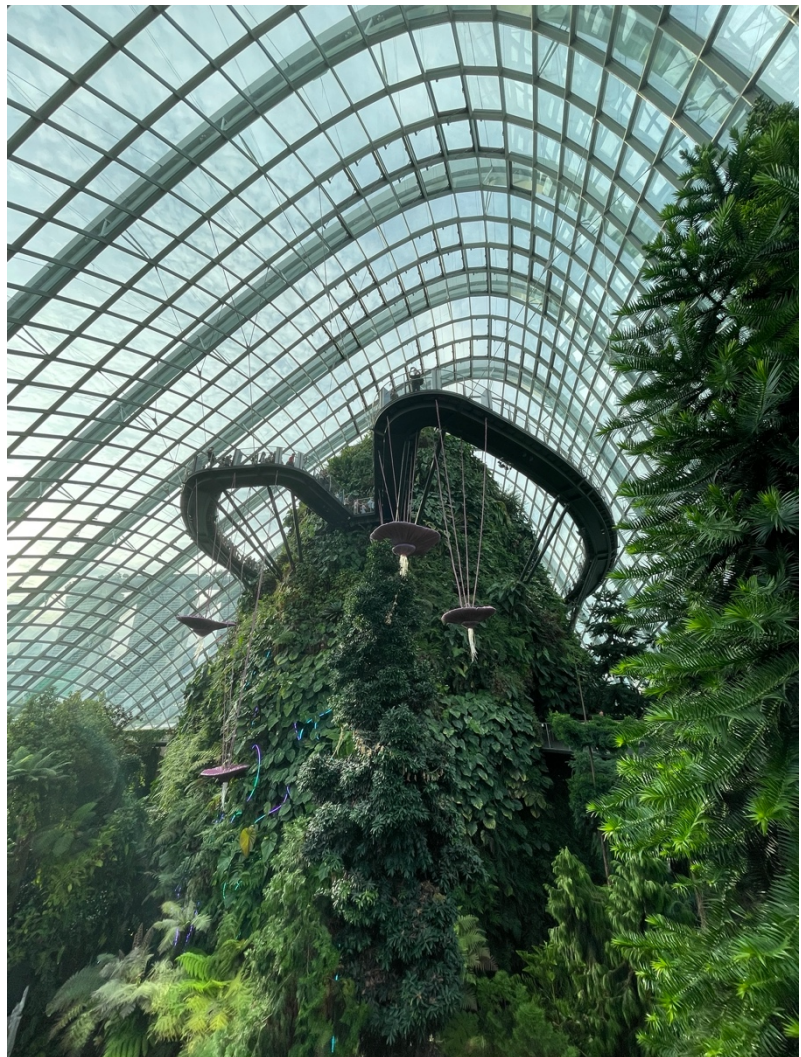
The latter spanned a broad range of philosophical fields of inquiry, such as epistemology, philosophy of mind, moral philosophy, and political philosophy. Through its thematic rather than chronological structure, it served me well in drawing out the connection between the various fields and being able to see AI (ethics) and its study at the cross-roads of many of these subfields. This helped immensely in locating the discussions had in the other three courses, and how they approach/play into the AI ethics study at large.

Science Fiction and Philosophy, for instance, carried an obvious connection to AI (ethics) given the prevalent involvement of AI and AGI in various science fiction works, such as Star-Trek, Interstellar etc. The course widened my view of the genre of science fiction and all the works within it (notably Frankenstein) and understanding the philosophical considerations/thought-experiments that are the foundation for many of these works. Moreover, the connection between science fiction works and what we can imagine and therefore build in the future, became ever more clear to me as a result.

Logic offered me an introduction to the subfield of logic in philosophy, particularly propositional logic and first order logic. Firstly, this was a unique opportunity as there are no comparable introductory logic courses I could have taken at LUC or Leiden University at large. Beyond the mere study of logic, it was also pivotal in my understanding of the mathematical philosophy that is at the core of computation, through logic gates and other procedures, and thus also underlies the formulation necessary for the design of AI in an effort to solve the value-alignment problem. Moreover, the course was formative to my goals after my Bachelor. Having found a passion in the study of logic both from a philosophical and computational perspective (as well as appreciation of the linguistic and mathematical aspects) I have come to consider a Master or certificate program in logic (particularly at UvA).

While less novel to me than *Logic,* the *Moral Philosophy* course was of great value to me as it expanded on my previous study at LUC from courses such as *Bioethics* and *Ethics of Contemporary War.* As such, the overview of the major metaethical positions, such as cognitivism/non-cognitivism, naturalism/non-naturalism, constructivism and error theory, to name a few, was extremely helpful in mapping the various approaches one may take in considering the underlying character of moral belief, which we then might want to put into AIs. Moreover, it was a joy to engage with the professor (Neil Sinhababu) who is very involved in the utilitarian community, and was very open to discuss his own works, serving as a comparative benchmark for much of the other theories and works we considered. Additionally, Prof. Sinhababu was encouraging in my pursuit of AI ethics and also put me into contact with one of his Masters students, which resulted in many interesting conversations and my involvement in ongoing projects on AI ethics that spans a variety of sectors.

Personal experience

Given the international character of Singapore, that is reflected in the full-time students as well as exchange students, the semester abroad at NUS is a prime opportunity to grown one's network not only within South-East Asia but globally. Through my time there I made friends from all over the world, some of which full-time and some of which exchangers. However, it has to be said that it was difficult at times to get involved in activities with full-time students, as I was not living on-campus.

Nevertheless, with a little effort one can becomes enmeshed in a mix of cultures that sheds a light on the history and importance of Singapore, and its remaining relevance in connecting East and West. As such, I also became more appreciative of the alternative government system (which is much more autocratic than western democracies). From this I was able to better understand the priority set on economic metrics, rather than political freedoms and positive rights, which is also mirrored in countries like China (while Singapore still maintains freedom of speech among other basic tenets of democracy and "universal" human rights).

In combination with the cultural wealth Singapore has accrued (despite its relatively short existence, in current form), was a great source of insight on the divergence in government (and citizens') priority as it concerns rights and freedoms. Thus, especially, with my major in World Politics, I benefitted greatly from my time in Singapore, providing perspective on the western-focused discourse in IR, particularly as it pertains to economic and sustainability goals, as well as ethics and human rights.

All of this is pivotal to my understanding and aim of studying AI ethics and further developing professionally into that field, as the underlying approaches to governance and international relations, originating from at time adverse as well as similar philosophical considerations, are formative in the approaches to AI regulation nationally, regionally, and globally.