

Course

Introduction to Philosophy (哲学导论), Spring Semester 2024

Teachers

Sebastian SUNDAY GRÈVE, coordinator (ssg@pku.edu.cn) (by appointment)

Julius SCHÖNHERR (schoenherrjulius@gmail.com) (office hours: Wednesdays 15:00–17:00)

Teaching assistants

蒋凡一 JIANG Fanyi (Lucy), lead administrator (2000014916@stu.pku.edu.cn)

陈昱竹 CHEN Yuzhu (2301210992@stu.pku.edu.cn)

李羽基 LI Yuji (2201210992@stu.pku.edu.cn)

梁家铭 LIANG Jiaming (Frank) (2201210836@pku.edu.cn)

廖新媛 LIAO Xinyuan (2001110832@stu.pku.edu.cn)

谈知辰 TAN Zhichen (2301210997@stu.pku.edu.cn)

田浩宇 TIAN Haoyu (2301211001@pku.edu.cn)

万舒婵 WAN Shuchan (2201110934@stu.pku.edu.cn)

王睿里 WANG Ruili (2201210991@stu.pku.edu.cn)

Locations

Lectures: Weeks 1–16, Tuesdays, 15:10–17:00, room tba

Discussion (required for 3 credits): Weeks 1–16, times to be determined, rooms tba

Level

Beginners; open to all students of the university; no prerequisites; auditors welcome

Description

This course is an introduction to philosophy in the Western tradition, with a focus on contemporary trends in analytic philosophy. It will cover topics in all of the main areas of philosophy including ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology.

Format

Weekly reading assignments will be limited to small amounts of text, on average less than ten pages; additional learning materials recommended by the teachers will be strictly optional. All students will receive extensive guidance on essay writing before they are given a choice of questions (at least one per studied topic) for the 500-word essay, which is to be written in the form of an exam in the second half of the semester. Students may take the course for either two or three credits. A third credit can be earned by participating in weekly discussion sections in addition to the lectures, including weekly written assignments of around 100 English words (which students can decide not to undertake at most three times); each section will be led by one of the teaching assistants, and individual groups will normally consist of no more than twelve students; there will be a choice of different discussion times, and students can choose their preferred discussion language (Chinese or English). Marking standards will differ between two-credit and three-credit students, so as to enable fair and objective evaluation of learning achievements according to the two different versions of the course.

Requirements

Weekly reading assignments, usually less than ten pages

Attendance (no more than three unexcused absences)

In addition, for a total of two credits

1 × 500-word essay, in-class, typically Week 13 (50% of the overall course mark)

1 × two-hour written examination, at the end of term (50%)

Alternatively, for a total of three credits

Participation in discussion sections (20%)

1 × 500-word essay, in-class, typically Week 13 (40%)

1 × two-hour written examination, at the end of term (40%)

Schedule of topics

1: Introduction: what is analytic philosophy?

2: Philosophical paradoxes

3: Science and philosophy

4: AI ethics

5: Dualism

6: Physicalism

7: Consciousness

8: Intentionality

9: The self

10: The analysis of knowledge

11: Truth

12: Nietzsche vs Socrates

13: Scepticism

14: Naming and necessity

Optional background reading

[In alphabetical order. All readings will be made available in electronic form.]

Beaney, Michael. 2017. *Analytic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Russell, Bertrand. 1912. *The Problems of Philosophy*. Williams and Norgate (Oxford UP, 1967).

Williamson, Timothy. 2018. *Doing Philosophy: From Common Curiosity to Logical Reasoning*. OUP.

Schedule of readings

[In chronological order. Optional further readings tba during lectures. All readings will be made available in electronic form.]

1: Introduction: what is analytic philosophy?

[no reading required]

2: Philosophical paradoxes

Russell. 1912. *The Problems of Philosophy*, 'Appearance and Reality' (pp. 1–6)

Clark. 2007. 'The Heap (The Bald Man, the Sorites, Little-by-little Arguments)' (pp. 80–86)

3: Science and philosophy

Russell. 1912. *The Problems of Philosophy*, 'The Value of Philosophy' (pp. 89–94)

Sunday Grève and Williamson. 2022. 'Philosophy as a Science' (pp. 30–35)

4: AI ethics

Liao. 2020. 'A Short Introduction to the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence', pp. 1–13

5: Dualism

Searle. 2004. *Mind: A Brief Introduction*, pp. 13–18, 33–4

6: Physicalism

Searle. 2004. *Mind: A Brief Introduction*, pp. 41–9, 52–61

7: Consciousness

Jackson. 1986. 'What Mary Didn't Know' (pp. 291–5)

Frankish. 2007. 'The Anti-zombie Argument', pp. 1–3

8: Intentionality

Putnam. 1981. *Reason, Truth and History*, pp. 303–10

Searle. 2004. *Mind: A Brief Introduction*, pp. 159–66

9: The self

Parfit. 1995. 'Reductionism and Personal Identity' (pp. 655–61)

10: The analysis of knowledge

Gettier. 1963. 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' (pp. 121–3)

11: Truth

Russell. 1918. '[Do Facts Make True Whatever Is True?]' (pp. 102–6)

12: Nietzsche vs Socrates

Plato. *Euthyphro* (pp. 2–16)

13: Scepticism

Descartes. 1641. *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 12–23

14: Naming and necessity

Kripke. 1972/80. *Naming and Necessity*, pp. 22–4, 26–31, 34–6, 47–9, 71, 83–5

Optional further readings

[To be announced, and distributed, during the semester.]

Writing advice for the 500-word essay

[This advice mainly concerns essays in philosophy, but much of it applies equally to the writing of other kinds of text.]

It is essential that your essay presents an argument in support of an answer to the question it addresses, and that this argument is briefly defended against one or more possible objections.

Clarity and precision are ideals generally worth striving for. Here 'clarity' means that any intelligent person who has never before heard about the issues you are addressing can understand your essay. And 'precision' means that no advanced philosopher can reasonably complain that the terms of your argument are vague or not well defined.

The following four principles may be derived from these ideals.

- (1) Restrict the scope of your essay to offering just an interesting part or version of an answer to merely an interesting part or version of the question (trying to offer a comprehensive philosophical treatment of anything in a short essay tends to be a hopeless undertaking).
- (2) Reduce the number of specialist terms to a minimum (because each one requires an explanation when it is first introduced).
- (3) Prioritise rigour—technical repetition, schematism, etc.—over beauty (for example, continue to use the same word rather than varying it for purely aesthetic reasons).
- (4) Give many examples (any claim that is not absolutely obvious should ideally be accompanied by an example, but you do not have so many words available, so choose your examples wisely).

Improving one's philosophical writing takes time and effort. It is generally advisable to finish a first draft early, and revise it later with at least a few days in between.

Please feel free to approach the teachers with any writing-related questions anytime. You may also benefit from reading Michael Huemer's writing guide (<https://www.owl232.net/writing.htm>).

Plagiarism

Students must not present someone else's work or ideas as their own by incorporating it into their course work without full acknowledgement. Students found in violation of this rule will fail the course. If in doubt, please consult the university's guidelines on plagiarism.