

PHIL 5150/7150
Topics in Western Philosophy 西方哲學專題

Course Outline

Time : Tue 16:30-19:15

Location: FYB 107B

Course overview (as shown on CUSIS)

This is a postgraduate seminar course devoted to examining selected topics in Western philosophy. The specific content of the course may vary from semester to semester. Students may repeat the course for credit, provided that two courses with identical course codes are not elected in the same semester.

Learning outcomes (as shown on CUSIS)

1. Demonstrate familiarity with the primary and secondary sources on the syllabus.
2. Gain competence in explaining and evaluating the key concepts and theories addressed in the course.
3. Be able to articulate and defend a philosophical thesis of their own concerning the issues discussed in the course.
4. Demonstrate progress in their papers toward mastering the expository and critical skills for argumentative writing.

Topics

What matters in survival

The question of what matters in survival is, roughly, the question of what relation to a future individual I must stand in (a) for it to be rational for me to have a special, selfish interest in that individual's well-being and (b) for that individual to be morally responsible for my past deeds. Here's one answer to this question: *identity* is what matters in survival, i.e., it's rational for me to have a special, selfish interest in a future individual's well-being – moreover, that future individual will be morally responsible for my past deeds – if and only if *I am* that individual. Not all philosophers accept this answer. Some philosophers say that what matters in survival is something besides identity.

In this course, we shall explore the question of what matters in survival, and in doing so we shall consider and evaluate some challenging arguments for different, competing answers to this question. We shall also explore some related questions. What kind of entity is a person? In virtue of what does a person persist? Is it always an objective fact whether a given person persists over a given period of time, or is the persistence of a person – at least in some cases – just a matter of convention? When does ethics depend on metaphysics, and when is it independent of metaphysics?

Learning activities

1. We shall read, discuss, and evaluate Part III of Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons*, along with a variety of related papers/chapters. Active participation will be expected.
2. Each student shall write a term paper that explores and makes an original contribution to philosophical discussion on our central topic.
3. Students shall present on readings and class discussion, as well as on their term paper plans.

Assessment scheme

<i>Task nature</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Term paper	3000-4500 words (in English), due 24 April, 5 pm. (Term paper topics must be approved by our week 11 meeting.)	60%
Paper presentation	In class during weeks 13 and 15	20%
Participation	In addition to active engagement in class discussion, participation will include contributions to a Blackboard forum (at least five weeks over weeks 2-12)	20%

Remark on AI Use: The University categorizes different approaches to AI use in the classroom and on assignments. This course adopts the following approach: “**Approach 1 – Prohibit all use of AI tools.** Students are not allowed to use any AI tools in any kind of learning activity or assessment that will be counted towards students’ final grade of the course, or used for evaluating students’ attainment of the desired learning outcomes. Students are expected to produce their own work independently without any collaboration or use of AI tools.” (from the University’s “Guidelines on the Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools in Teaching, Learning and Assessments”) *Accordingly, the use of AI on any of the assignments (including the term paper, the presentation, and the Blackboard forum) is strictly prohibited and will be considered plagiarism.*

Remarks on Assessment Scheme and Assignments

Term paper (60%). Each student is expected to write an original, high-quality paper in which they state and defend a substantial philosophical thesis on a topic related to the issues discussed in this course. The topic should be submitted *before* the week 11 (17th March) meeting. (Failure to submit the proposal on time will result in a 1/3rd letter deduction from the term paper grade.) The paper should be **3000 – 4500 words** in English (inclusive of footnotes but not the bibliography), and it should be sent to me (as a Word document) by **5 p.m. on 24 April**. Please adhere to the deadline and to the word count requirement. If the paper is late, an initial penalty of 1/3rd of a letter grade will be applied; an additional penalty of 1/3rd of a letter grade will then be applied for *each* additional 24-hour period before the paper is submitted. Similarly, for every 100 words over or under the word count, a penalty of 1/3rd of a letter grade will be applied.

Presentation on term paper (20%). Over the final two weeks of our seminar, each student will give a presentation on their term paper and then field questions from classmates and from me. The length of the presentation will be determined by the end of the (CUSIS) drop-add period, and we will seek to finalize the presentation plan (i.e., who will present when) shortly after this.

Participation, including Blackboard forum (20%). As this is a seminar, participation by each student is vital. Participation will take different forms, including but not necessarily limited to in-class discussion (as well as, potentially, to in-class group activities and to short presentations) and a Blackboard forum over weeks 2 through 12. Over this period, each student must submit a short response (about 4 – 8 sentences) to the Blackboard forum at least 5 times (that’s to say, 5 *weeks*). The response may be on the week’s reading, the previous week’s discussion, or to another classmate’s post, and it may take the form of a question, a response to a question, an objection, an argument, an inference, an interesting connection, etc. It should not be a summary. Students should also be prepared to elaborate on their responses, respond to questions regarding their responses, etc., in class. (Please note that the plan for the Blackboard forum is tentative and will be solidified after drop-add once the exact number of students in the seminar is known.)

It is important to be a regular contributor to class discussion. But bear in mind that participation will not be judged solely on quantity. Moreover, good participation in discussion can take many forms – asking clarificatory questions, asking questions that probe deeply into difficult issues, providing inciteful ideas, helping classmates to think through issues, contributing support or clarification to a classmate’s idea, providing constructive (and respectful) critique, etc.

Grade Descriptor

Please refer to: http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade_descriptors.pdf

Required reading

Parfit, Derek (1984). *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. [R&P]

Additional articles and book chapters. (See note 2 of the notes on the schedule below.)

Classroom Policies and Related Notes

Come prepared. Active reading and engagement with the text must be done prior to meetings. You should come to each meeting either with a good understanding of the material presented in the assigned reading or with questions that will help you to gain such an understanding. You should also bring both the current week's and the previous week's reading material (as well as any handouts) to the meeting, either in hard copy or on a tablet/e-reader (or, in special circumstances, on a laptop computer – see below).

Appropriate screen presence. I am committed to creating an environment in our classroom that is conducive to good discussion. To this end, please use technology in the classroom only for purposes specifically related to the current class activity (e.g., consulting the text, taking notes). I ask that you use a laptop *only if* (a) its use is critical to your optimizing your learning experience and (b) you are willing to sit somewhere that will ensure that the laptop isn't distracting to others. **Do not use cell phones (or leave them out on your desk) in class.** If you have a special reason why you need to use a cell phone in class, please discuss this with me individually beforehand.

Maintain a welcoming and supportive environment. It is important that we maintain a welcoming and supportive environment. Abrasive comments, derogatory language, etc., will not be tolerated.

Accommodations. I have designed this course with the goal that everyone in it can succeed. I also appreciate that there are multiple ways to learn. I would welcome students to discuss with me their learning styles and how we can try to accommodate them in this course.

My email and meeting policy. I am happy to answer short questions over email, and I am also happy to discuss more involved questions in person. But please email me **at least two business days in advance** of when you would like an email response, and if you wish to meet with me in person please email me **at least four business days in advance** of when, at the latest, you'd like to meet.

Course schedule*

<i>Week</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Required reading</i>
1	Introduction and metaphysical background	Olson, "Personal Identity", (in the <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i>) Haslanger, "Persistence through Time", §1-§3 only <i>Recommended: Korman, Objects: Nothing Out of the Ordinary</i> , Ch. 3: The Positions
2-6	Parfit's reductionist project	<i>R&P</i> , Part III <i>Recommended: Parfit, "Personal Identity" and "The Unimportance of Identity"</i>
7	No class (reading week)	
8-12	Alternative approaches	<i>See below (note 2).</i>
13 & 15 (no class wk. 14)	Student presentations	No new reading

24th April, 5 pm: Term paper due (by email)

*Notes on schedule:

1. Since this is a seminar, I plan to allow for some flexibility in what we focus on in discussion. Accordingly, we may carry over discussion of certain readings to the following meeting (and, if necessary, adjust the schedule accordingly).

2. The specific readings for weeks 8-12 will be determined closer to when the seminar begins and will include some (but nowhere near all) of the following*:

Rhys Davids (trans.), *The Questions of King Milinda* (Milinda Panha) (selection)

Javier Hidalgo, "Parfitian or Buddhist Reductionism? Revisiting a Debate about Personal Identity"

Mark Johnston, "Human Concerns with Superlative Selves"

Mark Johnston, "The Personite Problem: Should Practical Reasoning be Tabled?"

Christine Korsgaard, “Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit”
 Harold Langsam, “Pain, Personal Identity, and the Deep Further Fact”
 David K. Lewis, “Survival and Identity”
 John McDowell, “Reductionism and the First Person”
 Trenton Merricks, “Endurance, Psychological Continuity, and the Importance of Personal Identity”
 Trenton Merricks, *Self and Identity* (selection)
 Derek Parfit, “Lewis, Perry, and What Matters”
 John Perry, “The Importance of Being Identical”
 Stuart Rachels and Torin Alter, “Nothing Matters in Survival”
 Andrea Sauchelli, *Personal Identity and Ethics*, Ch. 2: “Buddhist No-Self Approach and Nihilism”
 Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (selection)
 Marya Schechtman, “The Narrative Self”
 David Shoemaker, “The Insignificance of Personal Identity for Bioethics”
 Theodore Sider, “All the World’s a Stage”
 Theodore Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism* (selection)
 Mark Siderits, “Buddhist Non-self: The No-Owner’s Manual”
 Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons* (selection)
 Jennifer Whiting, “Friends and Future Selves”
 Bernard Williams, “The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality”
 Bernard Williams, “The Self and the Future”
 Yao Zhihua, “On Memory and Personal Identity”
 *Any student who is planning to enroll in this seminar and is interested in one (or more) of these readings in particular is welcome to email to let me know.

Details of course website

We will use Blackboard.

Contact details for teacher

Teacher	
Name:	Nicholas RIMELL
Office location:	Room 416, Fung King Hey Building
Telephone:	3943 7139
Email:	nicholaskrimell@cuhk.edu.hk

Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>

With each assignment, students will be required to submit a signed declaration that they are aware of these policies, regulations, guidelines and procedures. For group projects, all students of the same group should be asked to sign the declaration.

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students’ uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.

