

Philosophical English

Fridays, 9:50–12:15

Zhenhua Building, B102

Peter Finocchiaro

My office: Zhenhua Building, B502

My office hours: Tuesdays, 14:00–18:00, and by appointment

My email: peter.w.finocchiaro@gmail.com

My QQ: 1983481653

Class QQ: 532368193



This course will be conducted online.

As of the beginning of the semester, I am still in America. I do not know when I will be able to return to Wuhan. It is very likely that I will not be able to return before the semester is over. However, if I am able to return, then we will transition this course into a regular in-person course. I will keep you updated as the semester progresses.

In the meantime, this course will be conducted online. The format will be as follows. I will upload lecture videos to the QQ group. In these videos, I will give you exercises to complete. **While you do not need to watch these videos and complete these exercises at a specific time of the week, you do need to do so on the week that the lecture is scheduled.** In addition, I will encourage group discussions in the QQ group as well as one-on-one conversations between me and each student (QQ, WeChat, email, etc.).

Course Description:

Our central goal in this course is to cultivate your ability to hold a productive philosophical conversation in English. To that end, I divide this course into three parts. In the first part, you will learn the “tools” of philosophy, focusing especially on the structure of philosophical arguments. In the second part, you will learn some key concepts in the areas of so-called “core” analytic philosophy (including metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language). In the third part, you will learn some key concepts in so-called “value theory” (including ethics, political philosophy, social philosophy, and aesthetics). Your participation in this course will center around oral conversations and short written exercises. (There will not be a final term paper.) In addition, because this course is an “introduction” to professional Anglophone philosophy, we will also occasionally discuss questions about how to do philosophy professionally.

Text: *For the Sake of Argument: How to Do Philosophy* by Robert M. Martin

In addition to reading portions of the above “textbook”, we will also read eight philosophy papers. These papers are seminal works in contemporary Anglophone philosophy; anyone who wants to do philosophy should be familiar with them. These papers will act as introductions to the philosophical concepts we will cover.

I will provide PDF files of all course material, including that of the text mentioned above.

A note about the reading: For each lecture, I will cover specific aspects of the reading assigned for that day. That being said, we are free to explore whatever issues come to mind, even if I do not cover it in one of my lectures. You should, therefore, read all of the material labeled as **required**. Furthermore, if you “have the time”, I heavily encourage you to read all of the material labeled as **optional**.

Letter Grade Distribution: In this course I will use the following scale to convert between numerical and letter grades:

96.00 - 100.00	A+	70.00 - 74.99	B-
90.00 - 95.99	A	67.00 - 69.99	C+
85.00 - 89.99	A-	63.00 - 66.99	C
80.00 - 84.99	B+	60.00 - 62.99	C-
75.00 - 79.99	B	00.00 - 59.99	D

Grade Distribution: Your overall grade is calculated as follows:

Debriefs	10% (1% each)
Exercises	44% (4% each)
Podcasts	45% (15% each)
Introduction	1%

Course Goals:

As I said above, our goal in this course will be to cultivate your ability to hold a productive philosophical conversation in English. I think it is helpful to divide this goal into two smaller goals. In other words, in order to hold a productive philosophical conversation in English, you need to: (i) understand the key philosophical concepts, and (ii) be fluent in holding a productive conversation. Below, I dissect these complex abilities into smaller, more “visible” components. This dissection will (I hope!) aid us in the direction of your learning as well as the measurement of your growth.

(i) An understanding of a key philosophical concept requires:

- the ability to succinctly summarize the concept;
- the ability to apply the concept through the use of examples;
- the ability to explain how (Anglophone) philosophers utilize the concept.

(ii) A fluency in verbally discussing philosophical questions (in English) requires:

- an awareness of the discussion’s topic, including an awareness of what is *off* topic;

- the ability to actively listen to and understand what is said by your interlocutor;
- a willingness to seek clarification when appropriate;
- the ability to make lucid contributions to the discussion.

Assignments

Debriefs: For every lecture, you will write a short ungraded “debrief” about that lecture. In your debrief, you will answer two questions: (1) what part of the material did you find the most interesting? (2) what part of the material did you find unclear or would like clarification on? You will share these debriefs in the class QQ group. I will then use the debriefs to identify topics that we can discuss together (either because many people in the class find the topic interesting or because many people in the class would like clarification).

Exercises: Every week, I will give you exercises to complete. These exercises will focus on the philosophical tools and concepts that we are discussing during that week. For some of these exercises, you will complete them on your own. For others, you will complete them with other students. I will grade these activities on a “ ✓- / ✓ / ✓+ ” scale. I will also give you feedback on which parts of the exercises you did well and which parts of the exercises could be improved.

Podcasts: You will collaborate with other students in small groups to make and record a 10-minute philosophical conversation. Your group may choose their own topic to discuss or they may choose to have a topic assigned by me. Ideally, the conversation will address issues covered in class, issues relevant to current events or culture, or issues connected to your own philosophical interests. These conversations will be recorded and emailed to me. Overall, you will complete three podcasts, each with the **different** group of students.

Introductions: I want to know who you are! Please record a short video introducing yourself. You can use my introduction video as a model to follow.

“Reading List” and Schedule:

Below is a tentative schedule of the material that we will cover throughout the semester.

Acronyms:

- “FSA” = *For the Sake of Argument: How to Do Philosophy* by Robert M. Martin

Unit 1: “The Tools of Philosophy”

Week 1: No Class

Required: FSA Introduction

Optional: None

Week 2: Necessary and sufficient conditions; objections vs. counter-arguments

Required: FSA Chapter 1; FSA Chapter 2

Optional: FSA Chapter 3

Week 3: Formalizing arguments; deductive arguments; validity and soundness

Required: FSA Chapter 5;

Optional: FSA Chapter 4, FSA Chapter 6

Week 4: Inductive arguments; arguments by analogy; inference to the best explanation

Required: FSA Chapter 11

Optional: FSA Chapters 7–10

Assignment: Podcast #1

Deadline: 9 October 2020, by 23:59 CST

Unit 2: “Core Analytic Philosophy”

Week 5: Epistemology

Required: James’s “Will to Believe”

Optional: Hieronymi’s “Responsibility for Believing”; Jackson’s “Belief, Credence, and Faith”

Week 6: Philosophy of Mind

Required: Nagel’s “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”

Optional: Seager’s “Consciousness, Information, and Panpsychism”; Strawson’s “Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism”

Week 7: Metaphysics and Philosophy of Language

Required: Lewis and Lewis’s “Holes”

Optional: van Inwagen’s “Quine’s 1946 Lecture on Nominalism”; Korman and Carmichael’s “What Do the Folk Think about Composition and Does It Matter?”

Week 8: Metaphysics and Philosophy of Action

Required: Frankfurt’s “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”

Optional: Frankfurt’s “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person”; Todd’s “A New Approach to Manipulation Arguments”

Assignment: Podcast #2

Deadline: 6 November 2020, by 23:59 CST

Unit 3: “Value Theory”

Week 9: Normative Ethics

Required: Singer’s “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

Optional: Hooker’s “Introduction to Rule-Consequentialism”; Zagzebski’s “Exemplarist Virtue Theory”;

Week 10: Applied Ethics

Required: Thomson’s “A Defense of Abortion”

Optional: Wasserman’s “The Nonidentity Problem, Disability, and the Role Morality of Prospective Parents”; Mackenzie’s “On Bodily Autonomy”

Week 11: Political Philosophy

Required: Rawls’s “Justice as Fairness”

Optional: Buchak’s “Taking Risks Behind the Veil of Ignorance”; Besch’s “On Political Legitimacy, Reasonableness, and Perfectionism”

Week 12: Aesthetics

Required: Goodman’s “Reality Remade”

Optional: Elgin’s “What Goodman Leaves Out”; Nanay’s “The Aesthetic Experience of Artworks and Everyday Scenes”

Assignment: Podcast #3

Deadline: 4 December 2020, by 23:59 CST