PHIL4443
Seminar on Philosophical Issues 哲學問題研討

Course Outline

Time: M 1:30pm-4:15pm	**Location: CKB 706C**

Course overview (as shown on CUSIS)

This is a seminar course devoted to examining selected issues in philosophy. The specific content of the course varies from semester to semester. Offerings with different subtitles can be taken up for credit, up to a maximum of two times. In Fall 2026, the course examines selected topics in the ethics and governance of artificial intelligence and big data.

Advisory to Majors: to be taken in year 3 or above.

Learning outcomes (as shown on CUSIS)

1. Gain competence in explaining and evaluating the key concepts and theories addressed in the course.

2. Demonstrate familiarity with the primary and secondary source texts in the syllabus.

3. Engage in in-depth discussion on the selected topics of the course.

4. Demonstrate ability to articulate and defend one's own philosophical theses with clarity.

5. Demonstrate consolidated skills in expository and argument writing.

6. Enhance ability to exchange reasons about controversial matters respectfully with the aim of uncovering the truth.

7. Enhance interpretative charity and intellectual honesty, which includes appropriate attribution to others of their ideas, and recognition and frankness about the limitations of one's own ideas.

Topics

Near-term AI and Human Welfare; AI and Justice; AI and Discrimination; AI and Fairness; AI and Relationships; AI, Gamification, and Communication; AI and Health; AI and Work; AI and Democracy; AI and Privacy; Democratizing AI

Learning activities

- Careful reading and annotating of reading materials before class
- Posting discussion posts online before class
- Careful thinking and discussion in class
- Make productive use of the writing process, including brainstorming, outlining, drafting, incorporating feedback, and revising, to develop a fledgling idea into a formal paper, presentation, and/or project.
- Share research, course content, or creative activity in writing and at least one other mode of communication relevant to the discipline. Other modes of communication might include presentations using one or more media, debate, discussion, poster presentations, and other forms of expression that convey course content.

Class Etiquette

I expect you to come to class well prepared and ready to learn. Pay attention to, and think about, what I am saying when I talk, to what your classmates are saying when they talk, and what you are saying when you talk. Turn your phones off before class begins, and put them somewhere that you will not be tempted to look at them. If I want you to use your phone (for example, to look up something that I don't know but that the class should know), I will tell you: only then is phone use acceptable. Also, you will not have your laptop out during class. You might think you are good at multitasking, but you're not. I quite understand that even when you are interested in what is going on in class you can be tempted to try to do something else too: my job is to prevent you acting on that temptation and, ideally, to prevent the temptation. What we are doing in this class is too interesting and too difficult for you to learn without paying as much attention as you can. The deal is this: I'll make it worth your while to pay attention to what's going on in class; you'll pay attention.

Many of the topics covered here are controversial and you may feel uncomfortable when discussing some of them. Those reactions are perfectly normal and not something to be afraid of or embarrassed by. Keep in mind that many of your classmates come from backgrounds that are very different from your own. In addition to differences in race, housing stability, healthcare needs, sex, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and economic status, some of your classmates will differ from you in their ideological, political, and religious commitments. It is important that everyone feels welcome to participate in class, so be mindful of the ways that others may be affected by what you do or say.

Multilingual Communicating

The course will primarily be taught in English. In this class, a range of linguistic backgrounds and levels of English proficiency will be represented. I expect oral and written accent (missing articles, incorrect prepositions, incorrect verb tenses) to be treated with respect. While all students in this course are expected to challenge themselves to become more effective and accomplished writers in English, we will not spend time worrying too much about the aspects of English that take many years to acquire (i.e. articles, verb tense, prepositions), but instead focus on expression of ideas and communicative competence.

Assessment scheme as prescribed on CUSIS (revise if necessary)

Task nature	***Description***	***Weight***
Essays	Mid-term (20%) and final (30%) projects	50%
Presentation	Presentation of final project (detailed instructions later)	20%
Attendance and participation	See below	30%

Remarks on Assessment Scheme (if any)

Note on Attendance: Attendance in class is expected but will not be graded directly. Instead, absences will count against your participation grade. After 2 unexcused absences, you will lose 5 participation points for each subsequent unexcused absence (25/30, 20/30, and so on). In other words, you have 2 free unexcused absences. Use these for a mental health day off, or to catch up on rest, etc. After that, you lose participation points. This means you cannot have more than 5 unexcused absences without losing all participation points and failing the class. Please contact me if you need to miss class (I'm lenient here).

Ways to Earn Participation Grade

Philosophy is done best in community and through dialogue, but good dialogue is something that requires cultivation and virtue. We will attempt to develop the skills and virtues necessary for sustaining good philosophical discussion. Hence, a large part of your grade consists in your participation through multiple means.

- Discussion posts: at most 2 points per reading and 30 points in total
- In-class participation: verbal and written; at most 15 points in total
- Contribute to Google document running list of questions and class glossary: 1 point per item; at most 10 points in total (Please do this after class. DO NOT do this in class)
- Make a 20-30 mins podcast: at most 10 points
- Office Hours: at most 10 points

Grade Descriptor

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

Use of generative AI in this course

AI tools are neither banned nor ignored in this course. They are useful, they are unreliable in ways that matter here, and learning to tell the difference is part of your education.

Permitted, with declaration:

- Checking grammar, spelling, and idiom in prose you have already written.
- Asking for explanations of a concept or reading you found difficult (as you would ask a classmate).
- Using an AI system as an objector: state your thesis, ask it to attack, and use the attack as raw material for your own thinking.

Not permitted:

- Generating any portion of submitted prose, including outlines, thesis statements, topic sentences, and paraphrases of readings.
- Using AI to summarize an assigned reading in place of reading it.
- Any use at all in in-class writing or online discussion posts.

Declaration. Every essay carries a short AI use statement: which tools, for what, at which stage. “None” is a complete and perfectly respectable answer. Undeclared use is an academic honesty matter; declared use within the permitted categories carries no penalty whatsoever. I am far more concerned about honest reporting than about policing tools.

Why the line falls here. Not because AI is dangerous, and not because I disapprove of it—I write about the ethics of these systems for a living. Because the specific ability this course develops is the ability to hold an argument in your own head and see where it breaks. Outsourcing that produces an essay and no learning, and you will have paid tuition for the essay.

Recommended learning resources

1. Writing a philosophy essay

Start here

- Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper" — https://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html The standard guide. Covers what a philosophy paper is for, how to structure one, and the most common ways they go wrong.
- Jim Pryor, "Sample Philosophy Papers" — https://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/samples/ Three papers answering the same prompt, two of them real student work, each annotated with what succeeds and what does not. If you have never seen a philosophy paper, read this before you read anything else.
- Jim Pryor, "Grades" — https://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/grades.html What the assessment criteria actually mean: understanding of the material, handling of the question, cogency of argument, independent thought, clarity.

Short and worth the fifteen minutes

- 1000-Word Philosophy, "How to Write a Philosophical Essay" — https://1000wordphilosophy.com/teaching/writing-essays/ Under a thousand words. The fastest orientation available.
- Amy Kind, "How to Write a Philosophy Paper" — https://www1.cmc.edu/pages/faculty/akind/intro01s/writing.htm Particularly good on two habits worth unlearning: reaching for a thesaurus, and varying your terminology for style. In philosophy, if you mean the same concept, use the same word every time.
- Angela Mendelovici, "A Sample Philosophy Paper" — search the title; a short paper with each argumentative move labelled in the margins.

If you want more

- Daily Nous, "How To Write A Philosophy Paper: Online Guides" —

https://dailynous.com/2026/05/04/write-philosophy-paper-online-guides/ A maintained collection of guides by many different philosophers. If Pryor's style does not suit you, one of these will.

2. Reading philosophy

Most essay problems begin as reading problems. You cannot reconstruct an argument you have not located.

- Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy" — https://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html How to read a philosophy text slowly, and why reading it once is never enough.
- Wireless Philosophy — https://www.wi-phi.com/ Short animated videos on core concepts and on critical thinking. Useful before a difficult reading rather than instead of it.

3. Reference works and finding sources

Use these to orient yourself and to find further reading. Do not cite an encyclopedia entry in place of the primary text it discusses.

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy — https://plato.stanford.edu/ Peer-reviewed and authoritative. The bibliographies are the fastest route from a topic to a set of real sources.
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy — https://iep.utm.edu/ Often more accessible than the SEP for a first pass.
- PhilPapers — https://philpapers.org/ Comprehensive index of philosophical work; free account recommended.
- PhilArchive — https://philarchive.org/ Open-access preprints. Useful when the Library does not hold an article.
- CUHK Library — https://www.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/ For everything behind a paywall. Log in through the Library, not Google, or you will hit paywalls the University has already paid to remove.

4. Academic honesty and plagiarism

Required reading

- CUHK, "Honesty in Academic Work: A Guide for Students and Teachers" — https://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/ This is the policy that governs your work in this course. It defines the categories of academic dishonesty, addresses the use of AI tools, and sets out the penalties, which range from demerits and a failing grade to suspension and a lowered degree classification. You are responsible for its contents.

Learning how to avoid plagiarism, as opposed to being warned about it

- HKU, "How to avoid plagiarism" — https://tl.hku.hk/plagiarism/how-to-avoid-plagiarism/ Works through a concrete example showing how a passage that copies no sentences verbatim is still plagiarism, because the idea and the example were taken without acknowledgement. This is the misunderstanding that produces most unintentional cases. Changing every word does not make an unattributed idea your own.
- HKU CAES, plagiarism tutorial — https://www4.caes.hku.hk/plagiarism/ A free interactive tutorial designed for students writing academic English as a second language. Roughly an hour, and worth it once.
- CUHK Library, "Using Information Responsibly for Your Assignments" — https://libguides.lib.cuhk.edu.hk/usinginfo/Home Academic honesty at CUHK, citation formats, reference management software, and copyright, in one place.
- Purdue OWL — https://owl.purdue.edu/ For the mechanics of citation and referencing in any style.

A note on quotation in philosophy

Philosophy essays quote less than essays in most humanities subjects. A string of quotations, however well chosen, is not an argument. Quote only when the exact wording is what you are analyzing. Otherwise reconstruct the position in your own words, and cite the passage you are reconstructing.

5. Language and writing support at CUHK

- Independent Learning Centre (ILC) — https://www.ilc.cuhk.edu.hk/ Workshops, one-to-one consultations, and online resources in both English and Chinese. Free, and already covered by

your fees. Consultations book out near deadlines, so go early in the term.

6. Optional: philosophy in Chinese

Not a substitute for the course reading, and not a source to cite, but useful if you find that thinking about a problem in Cantonese or Chinese unsticks it.

- 好青年茶毒室（哲學部） — https://corruptttheyouth.net/ A Hong Kong philosophy outreach group founded in 2016 by thirteen CUHK philosophy students. Essays, videos, and long discussion streams in Cantonese on ethics, meaning, freedom, language, and political philosophy.

Course schedule

Week	***Topics***	***Teaching Mode*** ***Online / in-campus***	***Required reading***	***Tutorials***	***Remarks***
Sept 7	Near-term AI and Human Welfare	In-campus	Birhane & van Dijk, "Robot Rights? Let's Talk about Human Welfare Instead" O'Neil & Gunn, "Near-Term Artificial Intelligence and the Ethical Matrix"	Interactive discussion will be held with lecture for 3 hours	
Sept 14	Theories of Fairness and Justice	In-campus	Timmons, "A Moral Theory Primer" Wolff, "The Distribution of Property", Chap 5 from *An Introduction to Political Philosophy*		
Sept 21	AI and Discrimination		Segall, "What's so Bad about Discrimination?" Angwin et al., "Minority Neighborhoods Pay Higher Car Insurance Than White Neighborhoods with the Same Risk"		
Sept 28	AI and Fairness		Barocas et al., "Introduction" in *Fairness and Machine Learning* Angwin et al., "Machine Bias" (COMPAS case) Hellman, "Measuring Algorithmic Fairness"		
Oct 5	Data and Fairness II		Hao & Stray, "Can You Make AI Fairer Than a Judge?" Castro, "What's Wrong with Machine Bias" Herington, "Measuring Fairness in an Unfair World"		
Oct 12	AI and Justice		Orentlicher, "Economic Inequality and College Admissions Policies" Waters & Miikkulainen, "GRADE: Machine Learning Support for Graduate Admissions" Zimmerman et al., "Technology Can't Fix Algorithmic Injustice"		
Oct 19	Public Holiday				
Oct 26	AI and Relationships		Kaliarnta, "Using Aristotle's theory of friendship to classify online		Watch *Her*

			friendships: a critical counterview" Klonschinski & Kuhler, "Romantic Love Between Humans and AIs: A Feminist Ethical Critique"		
Nov 2	AI and Work		Danaher, "The case for technological unemployment" in *Automation and Utopia* Frey & Osborne, "The future of employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerization?" Herzog & Gheaus, "The goods of work (other than money!)"		
Nov 9	AI and Work II		Van Parijs, "Basic Income" in *Redesigning distribution* Bergmann, "A Swedish-Style Welfare State or Basic Income" in *Redesigning Distribution* Cholbi, "A Duty to Work"		Student Presentations
Nov 16	AI and Democracy		Rini, "Fake News and Partisan Epistemology" Nguyen, "Why it's as hard to escape an echo chamber as it is to flee a cult" Alfano et al., "Technological Seduction and Self-Radicalization" WSJ "Blue feed, red feed"		Student Presentations
Nov 23	Democratizing AI		Johannes Himmelreich, "Against 'Democratizing AI'" Josh Simons, Algorithms for the People		Student Presentations
Nov 30	AI, Gamification, and Communication		Nguyen, "How Twitter Gamifies Communication"		Student Presentations

Details of course website

Contact details for teacher(s) or TA(s)

Teacher	
Name:	Li Shiying
Office location:	Room 412, Fung King Hey Building
Telephone:	
Email:	

TA	
Name:	
Office location:	
Telephone:	
Email:	

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.