

# Advanced Introduction to Philosophy

## Syllabus

Matthias Brinkmann ([matthias.brinkmann@philosophy.ox.ac.uk](mailto:matthias.brinkmann@philosophy.ox.ac.uk))

A one-week crashcourse introduction for new Master's students

---

### Overview

This course is a crash course in modern analytic philosophy, especially so-called “practical” philosophy, which you will primarily deal with during your time in Bayreuth. I will give you an overview into the characteristic questions and subfields of philosophy, and the methods and argumentative strategies commonly employed there. You do not need to have any background knowledge, though I will assume a willingness to work hard to get up to speed quickly.

There will be 10 sessions in the seminar. Most of these sessions will start with an interactive lecture on some key topics. We will then turn to open discussion and various exercises. We will not be able to achieve a comprehensive overview of all topics in philosophy, but I hope to get you started on some essentials, and perhaps awake an appetite for more.

In most sessions, we will discuss a text together. The texts I have chosen as reading are well-known and representative papers from modern analytic philosophy, and hopefully also interesting in themselves. For some texts, I will give you questions for reading in advance. Presenting a text can be a helpful exercise when you start doing philosophy—if you'd like to present one of the texts, please contact me.

There is a decent amount I require you to read, and you might find reading heavy going at first. Thus, it would be optimal if you get most of your preparation done before the course starts. If you're not able to do so, use the time around lunch and the afternoons to catch up on your reading. This is important as the aim of this course is for you to get a “feel” for analytic philosophy, which will not be possible if you do not read the texts.

In the companion seminar to this course, you will be taught the ins and outs of philosophical writing, so I will not focus on giving you advice on writing. However, if you want to read more on some topic, or have general questions about philosophy, I'm happy to help as best as I can.

Please note that I am not a faculty member at the University of Bayreuth. You will not be graded or marked, and your performance will not be assessed in any way in this course. The aim of this course is to give you a good and encouraging environment in which you can first

encounter philosophy (or refresh your memories of philosophy), and to help you as much as I can to get started in philosophy.

Feedback is always welcome, and I encourage your initiative and suggestions. If you want to read more or different texts, I will see what can be done. The schedule is planned very flexibly so that we can spontaneously adapt to your concerns and interests. If you have any concerns, raise them at any time. Don't hesitate to contact me with any questions.

---

## Location & Times

The seminar will run from **Tuesday, 23 September**, to **Saturday, 27 September**. Each day will contain two sessions, though we might be able to keep the Saturday short.

All seminar sessions will be in **S6 (GW II)**. The morning sessions will start at **10 am**, while the afternoon sessions will start from **13.30**. Each session will last around 2 to 2.5 hours, depending on your preferences and energy. The precise times are flexible and we will adapt them together.

---

## Sessions & Texts

If you have the time, try to read all the texts. If you read the texts far in advance of the course, it might be helpful to take adequate notes, so that you can refresh your memory of the texts easily. *The texts are long and might be difficult in the beginning*. Don't worry about this too much, it's a common experience.

In reading the texts, the following should be your primary aims: (1) get a feel for the *method* of these texts: the way they are structured and argue their point, and (2) try to understand in detail what point the author is arguing, and what steps in their argument they are using. In other words, it's as much important to understand *how* the papers work as it is to understand *what* they say.

If you are pressed for time, don't frantically try to read all the texts. Rather, focus on a few texts and read them well. Reading a text twice, or very slowly, or while taking extensive notes, can well be worth it. **Note** that below I tell you what to focus on in a text. Feel free to read the entire texts, but I should warn you that some of them are quite long and dense.

### Session 1. Philosophy

Welcome.

Interactive Lecture. Subfields of philosophy – analytic philosophy: short history and characteristics – arguments – necessary and sufficient conditions – giving definitions

Logic Exercise. We will do some simple exercises in logic and giving adequate definitions. No preparation needed.

Text & Discussion. Gettier, Edmund. "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23, no. 6 (1963): 121–123.

FOCUS: **whole paper**. See additional questions for reading.

#### Session 2. Normative Inquiry

Interactive Lecture. Normative language (goodness, rightness, etc.) – ethics – is–ought problem – normative arguments

Text & Discussion. Singer, Peter. "Rich and Poor." In *Practical Ethics*, 191–215. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

FOCUS: **whole paper**, though "Moral Equivalent of Murder?" (p. 194–9) is less important.

Preparation. We will organise the discussion in section 9. There will be additional readings for each of the groups.

#### Session 3. Applied Ethics

Interactive Lecture. Applied ethics – trolley problems – thought experiments – philosophical intuitions – doctrine of double effect

Text & Discussion. Thomson, Judith Jarvis. "The Trolley Problem." *Yale Law Journal* 94, no. 6 (1985): 1395–1415.

FOCUS: **sections 1-4 (p. 1395-1403)**, read the rest if you're interested.

#### Session 4. Normative Ethics

Interactive Lecture. Normative ethics – the big approaches – deontology – consequentialism

Text & Discussion. Hooker, Brad. "Consequentialism." In *Routledge Companion to Ethics*, edited by John Skorupski, 444–55. London: Routledge, 2010.

FOCUS: **whole paper**.

#### Session 5. Metaethics

Interactive Lecture. Metaethics – cognitivism – non-cognitivism – naturalism – non-naturalism – moral relativism

Text & Discussion. Mackie, John Leslie. *Ethics. Inventing Right and Wrong*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977.

FOCUS: **sections 1.1–1.3, 1.7–1.12** (p. 15–20, 30–49), **especially sections 1.8 & 1.9**. See also the additional questions for reading.

Exercise. There will be a group exercise on reconstructing arguments from a text. We will focus on reconstructing Mackie's arguments, so read the text carefully.

#### Session 6. Political Philosophy

Interactive Lecture. Rawls – justice – liberalism – borders

Text & Discussion. Caney, Simon. "Global Distributive Justice and the State." *Political Studies* 56, no. 3 (2008): 487–518. FOCUS: **pp. 487-505**, but read the rest for more context.

Session 7. Philosophy of Science

Interactive Lecture. realism and anti-realism – miracles argument – underdetermination – pessimistic meta-induction

Text & Discussion. Laudan, Larry. "A Confutation of Convergent Realism." *Philosophy of Science* 48, no. 1 (1981): 19–49.

FOCUS: **skip section 6.** See the additional questions for reading which explain what parts to focus on.

Exercise. There will be another exercise on reconstructing an argument.

Session 8. Philosophy of Economics

Interactive Lecture. Economics and falsification – economic models – ceteris paribus laws – "unrealistic" assumptions

Text & Discussion. Friedman, Milton. "Methodology of Positivist Economics." In *Essays in Positive Economics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

FOCUS: **skip section 4,** section 5 is also not very important. See the additional questions for reading which explain what parts to focus on.

Exercise. We will train textual exegesis by using Friedman's text.

Session 9. Discussion

Discussion. We will discuss two questions in this session: (1) Is morality relative? and (2) Should the state forbid hate speech? For each question, a group of students will give a philosophical argument for the claim, and another group will give the philosophical argument against.

We will train how to make philosophical arguments and react to philosophical criticism in this section.

Session 10. Wrapping Up

This session will be used for material we weren't able to finish earlier, for open questions, and feedback.

---

## Reading Recommendations

Below I have listed a few books which I think make for good introductory reading, or which I have personally found interesting or illuminating to read. *The list is not supposed to be in any form comprehensive or impartial.* First, the readings accompany the lectures, and as such cover only a fraction of what you might want to read. Second, these are personal and unofficial recommendations and should be understood as such.

Particularly recommended readings are marked with an asterisk (\*).

Routledge has a series titled “Contemporary Introduction to ...” which in my experience is excellent.\* I have read a couple of them, and can recommend “Philosophy of Language”, “Philosophy of Economics” and “Epistemology” in particular. The books are usually of medium length (~250 pages) and cover modern, analytic philosophy at an introductory level, while also going in-depth enough to be interesting for Master’s students.

Oxford University Press has a series of “Oxford Handbooks in ...” which are generally excellent as well.† You will be interested in the ones about “Political Theory”, “Philosophy of Economics”, “Business Ethics”, “Practical Ethics” and “Ethical Theory”. These handbooks usually try to be comprehensive and contain introductory articles on all big issues.

Another excellent series of general philosophy handbooks are the prestigious “Cambridge Companions”. They tend to be on more specific topics (e.g., “Cambridge Companion to Kant”), but they usually contain overview articles from the most prominent philosophers in the field.

Online, there is one source to be taken seriously: the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/>). But one cannot overstate how good it is! Many articles are written by the most prominent philosophers in the field. And while the quality and accessibility of the articles varies, they all give a solid introduction into the topic.

The SEP is one of the few online sources you can cite in your essays without hesitation. Below, I indicate various articles to read belonging to each topic. SEP articles also usually contain very good bibliographies, so it’s easy to delve from them into the literature.

#### Philosophy in General

\*Halbach, Volker. *The Logic Manual*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. (There are many introductory logic books, and most of them will do the job just fine. Picking up any book on logic and working with it thoroughly will improve your abilities.)

\*Lycan, William. *Philosophy of Language a Contemporary Introduction*. London; New York: Routledge, 2000. (The best introductory book in philosophy I know of. Very clear, insightful, and funny. Covers Russell in chapters 2-4.)

Bruce, Michael, and Steven Barbone. *Just the Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Arguments in Western Philosophy*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. (A good way to find out what might interest you. Each of the arguments is described very briefly and clearly.)

#### History of Analytic Philosophy

Soames, Scott. *Philosophical Analysis in the Twentieth Century*. 2 vols. Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003. (There is no

---

\* <http://www.routledge.com/books/series/SE0111/>

† <http://www.oup.co.uk/academic/philosophy/handbooks/>

“history of analytic philosophy” which I found consistently good; Soames’ strikes me as the best, even if Soames tends to overfocus on details.)

Ayer, A. J. *Language, Truth, and Logic*. New York: Dover Publications, 1952. (A historically influential book which helped popularise logical positivism.)

Braver, Lee. *A Thing of This World: a History of Continental Anti-realism*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2007. (Gives an interesting history of “continental” philosophy. For advanced readers.)

#### Normative Inquiry

\*Williams, Bernard. *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*. New York: Torchbook Library Edition, 1972. (A good and thoughtful introduction. Note that Williams is an idiosyncratic thinker.)

Rawls, John. *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000. (Rawls is a famous philosopher in his own right, and he here gives a solid overview of some of the major views.)

#### Applied Ethics

SEP ARTICLES: “Business Ethics”, “Intuition”, “Theory and Bioethics”, “Doing Vs. Allowing Harm”, and any other topics you might be interested in, e.g., “Cloning”, “The Donation of Human Organs”, “Death”, “Affirmative Action”, “Feminist Perspectives on Sex Markets” etc.

\*Singer, Peter. *Practical ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993. (One of the most famous books in applied ethics. Provocative, but very readable and clear.)

\*Nagel, Thomas. *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. (A selection of influential essays on various topics. Nagel is a good essayist.)

Singer, Peter (ed.). *Applied Ethics*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. (A selection of slightly older, but influential papers.)

Beauchamp, Tom, and James Childress. *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009. (This book advocates an approach which has been highly influential, especially among medical practitioners. Worth a look.)

Cohen, Andrew, and Christopher Heath Wellman (eds.). *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005. (A selection of recent essays on various applied topics. Go here if you want to read on some particular issue.)

#### Normative Ethics

SEP ARTICLES: “Consequentialism”, “Rule Consequentialism”, “Deontological Ethics”, “Kant’s Moral Philosophy”, “Virtue Ethics”, “Contractualism”, “Egoism”, “Value Theory”

\*Kagan, Shelly. *Normative Ethics*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998. (A well-written overview on normative ethics with an eye to people new to philosophy. Thoughtful and moderate.)

\*Parfit, Derek. *On What Matters*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. (A recent book by a famous moral philosopher. Parfit has a very peculiar style of philosophising, and his conclusions are also controversial. Still, there's no way around Parfit.)

\*Wood, Allen. *Kantian Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. (Wood gives a good and spirited introduction into Kantian ethics which tries to dispell many myths about Kant's ethics. Not uncontroversial in its interpretation of Kant, but nothing is.)

Korsgaard, Christine. *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. (A selection of influential articles on Kant.)

Foot, Philippa. "Utilitarianism and the Virtues." *Mind* 94 (1985): 196–209.

Scheffler, Samuel. "Agent-centred Restrictions, Rationality, and the Virtues." *Mind* 94, no. 375 (1985): 409–419. (These two essays are best read together. Foot and Scheffler debate what the fundamental appeal of consequentialism might be.)

Scanlon, Thomas. "Contractualism and Utilitarianism." In *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, edited by Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, 103–128. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. (The original article in which Scanlon developed contractualism. Slightly more readable than the book, *What We Owe To Each Other*.)

### Metaethics

SEP ARTICLES: "Metaethics", "Moral Realism", "Cognitivism vs Non-Cognitivism, Moral", "Moral Anti-Realism", "Moral Non-Naturalism", "Moral Naturalism", "Supervenience", "Moral Epistemology", "Moral Relativism"

\*Miller, Alexander. *An Introduction to Contemporary Metaethics*. Cambridge: Polity, 2003. (Perhaps the only decent general introduction to metaethics. At times too advanced, and with no focus on history, but comprehensive and critical.)

Shafer-Landau, Russ. *Moral Realism: a Defence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. (Very clearly written. Advocates a form of moral realism, and touches upon all the major questions—metaphysics, epistemology, language.)

Audi, Robert. *The Good in the Right*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004. (Focusses on moral epistemology, and defends intuitionism. Does this partially by the exegesis of historical authors, which is done well.)

Blackburn, Simon. *Essays in Quasi-realism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. (A selection of influential essays on expressivism. At times hard to understand.)

Smith, Michael. *The Moral Problem*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994. (A very influential book. Focusses on arguments from motivation. Advanced, and not written with an eye to beginners.)

### Political Philosophy

SEP ARTICLES: “John Rawls”, “Original Position”, “Liberalism”, “Distributive Justice”, “Justice and Bad Luck”, “Desert”, “Egalitarianism”, “Equality”, “Equality of Opportunity”

\*Kymlicka, Will. *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. (Covers liberalism, egalitarianism, libertarianism well. Kymlicka is critical throughout, and does not try to hide his allegiances.)

\*Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Revised Edition. Harvard: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999. (The groundbreaking book in political philosophy. Love it or hate it, you’ll have to read it sooner or later.)

\*Dworkin, Ronald. *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality*. Harvard University Press, 2002. (Is a collection of ground-breaking articles Dworkin wrote. Like *A Theory of Justice*, these are close to a must-read.)

Christiano, Thomas, and John Philip Christman (eds.). *Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. (A selection of articles on various questions. All essays are recent and of good quality, and should allow students to get to some more specific questions.)

Parfit, Derek. “Equality and Priority.” *Ratio* 10, no. 3 (1997): 202–221. (A short but famous article on equality. Formulates the “levelling down objection”. Go from here for some of the more technical debates.)

Freeman, Samuel. *Rawls*. London: Routledge, 2007. (There’s likely to be no one who knows Rawlsian philosophy better than Freeman. For an introduction, this book is too long, but it covers everything, and defends Rawls on central points.)

Cohen, G. A. *If You’re an Egalitarian, How Come You’re so Rich?* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000. (Cohen is an “analytic marxist”. Cohen is perhaps one of the funniest and most readable political philosophers, and always thought-provoking.)

Anderson, Elizabeth. “What Is the Point of Equality?” *Ethics* 109, no. 2 (1999): 287–337. (A different perspective on equality.)

### Philosophy of Science

SEP ARTICLES: “Scientific Realism”, “Structural Realism”, “Constructive Empiricism”, “Abduction”, “Theory and Observation in Science”, “Underdetermination of Scientific Theories”

\*Rosenberg, Alexander. *Philosophy of Science: a Contemporary Introduction*. London; New York: Routledge, 2000. (The best introduction I know of. Comprehensive, and undogmatic in its treatment.)

\*Papineau, David (ed.). *The Philosophy of Science*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. (A selection of famous papers on epistemological issues.)



van Fraassen, Bas. *The Scientific Image*. Oxford: Clarendon Pr., 1987. (Defends “constructive empiricism”. Interesting and ground-breaking throughout.)

Popper, Karl. *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. New York: Harper & Row, 1968. (A good classic to start one’s reading, which one can follow up with Kuhn, Feyerabend, Lakatos etc. if one has the time.)

#### Philosophy of Economics

SEP ARTICLES: “Philosophy of Economics”, “Preferences”, “Ceteris Paribus Laws”, “Game Theory”

\*Hausman, Daniel. (ed.) *The Philosophy of Economics: An Anthology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. (As the title says, contains many of the most famous writings on the philosophy of economics [e.g., Friedman’s paper]. Evenly balanced between historical and recent contributions.)

\*Reiss, Julian. *Philosophy of Economics: a Contemporary Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2013. (The best introduction to the philosophy of economics. Covers recent topics.)

Kincaid, Harold, and Don Ross. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Economics*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Hausman, Daniel, and Michael McPherson. *Economic Analysis, Moral Philosophy, and Public Policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. (This book is not strictly speaking about the philosophy of economics, but rather covers the intersection of moral and political philosophy, and philosophy of economics. It covers a variety of topics and makes for good introductory reading.)

Hausman, Daniel. *The Inexact and Separate Science of Economics*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. (An older book which covers the philosophy of economics quite comprehensively.)