

PL362 The Problem of the Philosophy of History

Seminar Leader: Thomas Raysmith
Email: t.raysmith@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 12:30-13:30 or by appointment

Course Description

G. W. F. Hegel articulated the following problem for those who assert that philosophy has a history. Philosophy is often claimed to discover unchanging truths. Yet history delivers an array of discordant systems. It would thus seem that there is no history of philosophy but only a history of conflicting opinions. In this course, we will study various conceptions of philosophy advanced by thinkers past and present who have attempted to support either the position that philosophy has a history or the position that it does not. We will consider the ways in which philosophy has been distinguished from other disciplines, the question of whether there are any common and perennial philosophical topics, and the methodologies proposed for conducting research in the history of philosophy. We will also analyse and challenge traditional narratives of the history of philosophy in light of critiques of sexism, Eurocentrism, colonialism, etc. This course is an investigation into how we do and should tell and research the history of human thought.

Requirements

Students are expected to attend all classes unless there are extenuating circumstances. Classes will be run as seminars, with students expected to read materials and contribute to the discussion. Students are also expected to submit all assignments by the due date.

As seminar leader, I will make myself available for meetings if they are requested. If you are struggling with the material, need help coming up with ideas for your essays or talks, etc., please do not hesitate to request a meeting.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment

Students will be assessed based on 2 essays they are required to submit (1st essay due March 27, 2nd essay due May 15). Students must present essay plans for both essays to the seminar leader no later than 1 week before their respective due dates.

Each student will also be assessed based on a 10–15-minute introductory talk to 1 class that they are required to deliver.

Finally, students will be assessed based on their preparation for and contribution to classes.

Assignments

Students are required to submit 2 essays. Each essay must focus on a topic covered in class, up to and including the class of the week of submission. The word count of each essay must be 2500 (+ or – 10%). Each essay must reference at least 5 sources.

Students are also required to deliver an introductory talk to 1 class that covers the thinkers and material of that class. The talk must be 10-15 minutes in duration.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

1st essay = 25% of total grade

2nd essay = 25% of total grade

Introductory talk = 20% of total grade

Seminar preparation and participation = 30%

Schedule

Class date	Readings	Assignments
January 30	Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida (selections)	
February 6	Guest lecture 1 of 2 with Dr Troy Vine Wittgenstein, Ludwig: <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (selections) Kuhn, Thomas: <i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i> (Ch. 10)	
February 13	Guest lecture 2 of 2 with Dr Troy Vine Goethe, Newton, Kuhn (selections)	

February 20	Midgley, Mary: <i>The Myths We Live By</i> , selections	
February 27	Langer, Susanne: <i>Philosophy in a New Key</i> , selections) Cassirer, Ernst: <i>Language and Myth</i> , selections	
March 6	Ricoeur, Paul: <i>Time and Narrative</i> , Ch. 6	First essay due March 6
March 13	<i>Nyaya Sutras of Gotama</i> , selections Koller, John <i>Asian Philosophies</i> , Ch. 6	
March 20	Ganeri, Jonardon: <i>Indian Logic</i> , Introduction	
March 27	Confucius: <i>Analects</i> , selections Lai, Karyn: 'Learning from Models'	
April 10	Nishida, Kitaro: <i>An Inquiry into the Good</i> , selections Collins, Randall: <i>The Sociology of Philosophes</i> , pp. 341-347	
April 17	Gordon, Lewis: <i>An Introduction to Africana Philosophy</i> (Ch. 6, selections)	
April 24	Andrews, Munya: <i>Journey into the Dreamtime</i> , selections Muecke, Stephen: <i>Ancient and Modern</i> , selections	
May 8	Nzegwu, Nkiru: <i>Family Matters</i> , selections	Second essay due May 7

Essay Deadlines

1st essay: March 6

2nd essay: May 7

Essays must be submitted via Google Classroom

Grades Submission

Final grades for graduating students will be submitted by May 8, 2026, at noon.

Final grades for all other students will be submitted by May 29, 2026.

Library and Book Purchase Policies

Digital versions of all reading materials will be provided to students by the seminar leader.