HKU03x Humanity and Nature in Chinese Thought

Week 1: Introduction: God, Nature and Dao
Section 4: Ethics: context: four philosophy fields--Metaphysics (naturalism), epistemology (science), Logic & Semantics, Ethics/normativity/value

- Four areas of Philosophy
    - Metaphysics
    - Epistemology
    - Logic & semantics
    - Ethics & value theory
    - Metaphysics's subject matter is reality
    - Epistemology's subject matter is knowing
    - Logic & semantics' subject matter is reasoning & meaning
    - Ethics & value theory's subject matter is guidance: what to do and how to behave
- Metaphysics was the core of Philosophy during the Classical Greek period
- In Early Modern philosophy, epistemology becomes more central
- Logic & semantics become central in the 20th century
- In the 21st century the center is shifting to ethics—normative versions of the other three fields
- China's center of focus in its classical period was ethics
- Metaphysics: What is real
- Dominant within metaethics was idealism
    - Natural world an illusion - Ideas are more real than matter
- Opposed to idealism is materialism
    - Greek version: reality is matter in motion
    - Chinese version is more biological, with its focus on 氣*qi* breath

  - Modern form is physicalism with both matter (particles) and energy (fields)
- Third topic in metaphysics is *dualism* – accepts both kinds of reality
  - Ideas & matter both exist separately
  - A non-natural, two-world conception
- Opposed to dualism is *monism* - there's only one real world
  - Could apply to *idealism* but tends to imply e*naturalism*
  - We can call the ancient Chinese *monists*
  - Extreme, absolute Monism - there is only one *object* (e.g. God, Buddha-nature, *dào* or Being itself)
- Epistemology: How do we know?
  - Classical Greeks were rationalists - knowledge comes from reasoning
    - Has links with idealism
  - Empiricism - knowledge comes from experience
    - Science uses a combination of reasoning and empirical observation
  - Skepticism - you cannot know anything
    - You cannot learn from your experiences or from pure logic
    - Skepticism refers to pessimism about the topics or extent of knowledge
  - Pragmatism - knowledge comes from practice
    - Knowledge is what works
    - Practice leads to success
- **Logic & semantics - What makes a good argument, a proof?**
  - Proof model comes from ancient Greek geometry
  - Focus on definition - hence the importance of semantics

- Semantics: the study of the how words relate to reality
- We find more semantic reasoning than logic in ancient China. Semantics with a normative focus--what is the right way to use words

- **Ethics is the fourth field**