# **Department of Philosophy**

# **Module descriptions 2024/25**

# **Level H (i.e. normally 3rd Yr.) Modules**

Please be aware that all modules are subject to availability.

For many of these modules, some experience of studying Philosophy may be required, and you should remember this when choosing your modules. If there is another module that you need to have studied before taking this, it will be stated in the module description.

Please note that at the time this document has been prepared (February 2024) the following information is provisional, and there may be minor changes between now and the beginning of 2024/25 academic year.

**Please note: Forms of assessment are currently undergoing review for 2024/25, and as a result the assessment information listed within this handbook may be subject to change.**

# **SEMESTER 1 MODULES**

## **LH Just War**

Module Code: 29256

Credit Value: 20

Semester: 1

Pre-requisites: None

**Module Description**

This module is an introduction to contemporary debates about the ethics of war, addressing some fundamental questions in applied ethics. Can war ever be morally justified? Are there moral constraints on the conduct in war? Do international laws regulating armed conflicts have moral foundations? The module focuses on just war theory as the dominant view about the ethics of war. Some of the topics covered include theories of individual self-defense and their relation to collective self-defense, the morality of preventative and humanitarian wars, the moral basis of the principle of non-combatant immunity, the moral status of terrorism, and the post-war obligations of formerly warring parties.

Suggested Reading:

Helen Frowe, *The Ethics of War and Peace*, Routledge, 2015

Assessment

Two parts:

(a) One 1000 word essay (40%)

(b) One 2000 word essay (60%)

## **LH Prejudice, Race and Gender**

Module Code: 26796

Credit Value: 20

Semester: 1

Pre-requisites: None

Module Description

We take ourselves to be rational agents, going about in the world in a fairly rational manner. Even if we don’t always end up doing so, we assume that acting and judging rationally is within our reach if we try to do so. However, we also commonly recognise that our judgements and actions are sometimes prejudiced in various ways. This module is an investigation into the different faces of prejudice, its bearing on our conception of ourselves as rational agents, and its ethical and political implications. The guiding questions are whether the existence of prejudice undermines our capacity for rational judgement and action in significant ways, and what we might be morally required to do to address any shortcomings.

We start with a cluster of startling and fascinating empirical results from psychology, which demonstrate the range and extent to which unconscious, or implicit, bias drives everyday behaviour. In particular, there is a large psychological literature investigating a cluster of phenomena involving implicit bias along gender and racial lines. We will then turn to philosophical discussions surrounding implicit bias and other unconscious convictions in several areas of philosophy. Topics for discussion will likely include several of the following:

•The nature of the categories such as gender and race. In particular, are they biologically real or social constructs? What benefits and costs are there in accepting either the biological or the social view?

•The phenomenon of implicit bias. What are they and what is so troubling about them?

•Debates in epistemology about cognitive penetration of perception – in what sense does implicit bias undermine the idea that our perceptual beliefs are justified?

•Moral and political issues raised by the prevalence of implicit and explicit racial and gender biases. For instance, to what extent can individuals be morally responsible, or blameworthy, for the fact that they harbour such biases? In what ways might we be morally required, whether as individuals or a political community, to try to overcome or unlearn these biases, or at least alleviate their effects? In particular, is so-called ‘affirmative action’ in education, the workplace, or politics, an appropriate response or remedy to the persistence of racial and gender prejudice, or, as some claim, is it a case of two wrongs not making a right?

Suggested readings:

If you would like some background reading for the course, take a look at the generalist introductions below, which touch on some relevant themes that we will cover:

•Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017). *Why I’m No Longer Talking to White People about Race*. Bloomsbury. “Preface” (pp. 6-9)

•Audre Lorde (2018). *The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House*. Penguin Modern. “The Master’s Tools” (pp.16-21). Widely available online if you put the title/author into a search engine

•Ta-Nehisi Coates, “Letter to My Son”, *The Atlantic*, 04/07/2015, available here: https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/tanehisi-coates-between-the-world-and-me/397619/ (Links to an external site.)

•Daniel Kahneman (2012). *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. London, Penguin. “Introduction” (pp.3-15).

Assessment

Two parts:

(a) 2000 word essay (50%)

(b) 2000 word essay (50%)

## **LH Nietzsche**

Module Code: 26095

Credit Value: 20

Semester: 1

Pre-requisites: None

**Module Description**

This module explores Nietzsche’s views on naturalism and normativity. We will consider questions such as: Are all properties natural properties? Should philosophical inquiry be continuous with the sciences, and, if so, how? Are there any facts about what is morally right or wrong, or evaluatively good or bad? How, if at all, should facts about the causal origins of our normative views affect what norms and values we should accept? The primary goal of the module will be to understand Nietzsche’s views on these questions and to assess their plausibility and implications. We will focus primarily on On the Genealogy of Morality and Beyond Good and Evil. Selections from other works will also be considered.

Preparatory Readings:

Nietzsche, Friedrich (1886-7): *On the Genealogy of Morality*

Assessment

Two parts:

(a) One 2000 word essay (50%)

(b) One 2000 word essay (50%)

## **LH Social Justice**

Module Code: 30837

Credit Value: 20

Semester: 1

Pre-requisites: None

**Module Description**

This module explores different aspects of one of the most important debates in the contemporary political philosophy: social and distributive justice. Socio-economic inequality is among the most pressing moral and political issues of our time. Its relevance has been sharply highlighted by the effects of the current pandemic. In this module, we investigate what forms of socio-economic inequality are (un)justifiable and why. The module begins with John Rawls’s seminal account of social justice, which understands justice as fairness. After this, students will read some of the most relevant direct critiques of Rawls’s theory. In the second part, the module will cover a number of debates on particular issues that evolved from philosopher’s engagement with Rawls’s work. Topics covered here include issues such as relational vs distributive equality, basic income, the idea of a cap on wealth and income, race and distributive justice, gender and distributive justice, and the idea of a meritocracy.

Suggested readings:

Clayton, Matthew and Williams, Andrew (eds.) (2004): *Social Justice* (Blackwell)

Kymlicka, Will (2002): *Contemporary Political Philosophy – an Introduction* (Oxford University Press).

Assessment

Two parts:

(a) 2000 word essay (50%)

(b) Online Test – via Canvas (50%)

## **LH Fantastic Beasts and How to Understand them: Topics in Philosophy of Biology**

Module Code: 30840

Credit Value: 20

Semester: 1

Pre-requisites: None

**Module Description**

Biology is the single most important discipline for understanding the nature of humanity, and our place within the universe.

This module will examine various major theories and debates in the philosophy of biology and will also apply these ideas to several philosophically puzzling phenomena. No prior knowledge of biology is required.

Topics covered may be selected from the following list, though the provision may change year on year:

understanding evolutionary biology; teleosemanics, race, species and biological classification, biological functions; natural kinds in biology; evolution and aesthetics, evolution and ethics, evolution and religion, biology and society, dreaming, self-deception, altruism, units of selection, archaeobiology, and other topics in the philosophy of biology.

**Assessment:**

2 x 2,000 word essays (50% each)

# **SEMESTER 2 MODULES**

## **LH Philosophy of Mathematics**

Module Code: 26094

Credit Value: 20

Semester: 2

Pre-requisites: **Student will need to have an appropriate experience of Logic. Please contact the module leader before selecting this module.**

**Module Description**

This module is an introduction to the central concepts, themes, and figures in philosophy of mathematics. We begin with a survey of the logical and mathematical notions presupposed in the main debates. We then study the most influential “isms” in this field: logicism, formalism, intuitionism, structuralism, realism, empiricism, and nominalism. The last lecture of the module provides an overview of recent controversies, focusing on the philosophy of set theory. The reading of primary sources will also give us the opportunity to become familiar with key historical thinkers such as Frege, Hilbert, Carnap, Gödel, and Dummett.

Suggested Reading:

Shapiro, Thinking about Mathematics, Oxford University Press, 2000.

Linnebo, Philosophy of Mathematics, Princeton University Press, 2017.

Benacerraf and Putnam (eds.), Philosophy of Mathematics: Selected Readings, Second Edition, Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Assessment

1 x 1 hour in class exam (30%)

1 x 3000 word essay (70%)

## **LH It’s About Time**

Module Code: 30950

Credit Value: 20

Semester: 2

Pre-requisites: None

**Module Description**

This module covers the contemporary issues in the metaphysics of time. Topics which will be covered will include topics such as:

•The Ontology of Time: Does the past exist? Does the future? Is it only the present which exists?

•Tense: Is the present moment metaphysically special?

•Timelessness: Might there be no time, contrary to what we see around us?

•Persistence: How do objects go from one time to another?

•Time Travel: Can anything go back in time? What would the world be like if it did?

•Other Disciplines: How does physics bear on the metaphysics of time? How does the philosophy of time bear on issues in the philosophy of religion?

Preparatory Readings:

Baron, S. and Miller, K. 2018. *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Time*, Polity Press.

Curtis, B. and Robson, J. 2016. *A Critical Introduction to the Metaphysics of Time*, Bloomsbury.

Le Poidevin, R. 2005. *Travels in Four Dimensions: The Enigmas of Space and Time*, Oxford University Press.

Assessment

Two parts:

(a) One 2000 word essay (50%)

(b) One 1 hour exam (50%)

##  **LH Being Good and Doing Right**

Module Code: 26794

Credit Value: 20

Semester: 2

Pre-requisites: None

**Module Description**

What is the good life?  What moral requirements are there on us?  Should we aim to do whatever our moral duty is, or should we aim to be good people?  Questions like these are the subject-matter of moral theory.  This module will examine issues found in recent work in moral theory, including some of the following:

* Should we think that the consequences of our actions are all that matters to the morality of those actions?
* If this view (consequentialism) is true, what form does the best version of consequentialism take?
* Is there a contemporary version of Kantianism that is a more plausible moral theory?
* Are there good objections to both consequentialist and Kantian theories, such as the objection that someone who lived the way those theories require would not be a good person, or would not have a good life?
* Can a Kantian or a Consequentialist be a friend?
* What philosophical account can we give of friendship and love, and how might these relate to ethics?

In looking into these issues we are likely to stumble across other topics for discussion, such as the nature of happiness and well-being, the nature and importance of love and friendship in the good life, and the nature of virtue.  (In any given year, the precise issues covered may vary.)

Readings:

Crisp and Slote (eds.) Virtue Ethics (OUP, 1997).

Assessment

Two parts:

(a) 2000 word essay (50%)

(b) 2000 word essay (50%)

## **LH Topics in Philosophy of Religion**

Module Code: 26825

Credit Value: 20

Semester: 2

Pre-requisites: None

**Module Description**

This module covers a variety of topics in the philosophy of religion, focussing--thought not exclusively concerned with--contemporary issues. The topics covered will include some of the following:

•Various arguments for the existence of a deity, god, or divine being e.g. the Cosmological Argument (is there a first cause, or fundamental explanation, which requires God?), the Fine Tuning Argument (do the constants of the universe indicate that God designed the universe?), the Ontological Argument (can we reason from 'God is Perfect' to God existing on the grounds that, more or less, a non-existent God is imperfect?);

•Atheistic arguments e.g. the long-standing problem of evil whereby God cannot exist because of the presence of evil in the world. (Focus will be given to responses to the problem of evil, which may include contemporary responses such as the 'multiverse response' that God was obliged to create every possible universe, including our imperfect one, in order to create the perfect world.)

•The rationality of belief in God. Are theists justified in believing in God? Are atheists justified in not believing? Is agnosticism the only reasonable position? What role, if any, must evidence play in theistic belief?

•The nature of prayer, providence, and prophecy. Why pray if God already knows what you need and want? Is our free will compatible with God's foreknowledge of what we will do?

•The nature of the afterlife. What positive role could Hell play in existence? How can it be reasonable to punish an individual to eternal punishment, no matter how terrible the crime they committed? How can we come back to life once we have ceased to be? How can I go to Heaven if, as materialism says, I am nothing but a physical brain?

•The philosophical theologies of different religions e.g. the nature of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and Original Sin.

Preparatory Reading:

Everitt, Nicholas 2010: ‘The Divine Attributes’. Philosophy Compass. Vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 78–90.

Assessment

Two parts:

(a) One 1500 word essay (50%)

(b) One 1500 word essay (50%)

## **LH Reason and Belief**

Module Code: 31431

Credit Value: 20

Semester: 2

Pre-requisites: None

**Module Description**

On the epistemology side, our main focus is on the concept of epistemic justification: for a belief to count as knowledge, must it be justified by a foundation, or is justification holistic or infinitist? To have knowledge must a thinker be aware of her reasons or evidence, as traditional ‘internalists’ maintain, or should we seek a more naturalistic, ‘externalist’ conception, free of that assumption? Following that, we’ll consider some issues concerning distinctive sources of knowledge: e.g. perception, thought, memory, and/or testimony.

Knowledge is closely related to belief and reasoning, and so philosophical questions about the mind fit well with the theory of knowledge. In this part of the module we'll examine some of the following questions: How do beliefs and other psychological states represent the world outside? How do they relate to phenomenal properties, and are the latter distinctively problematic? In predicting and explaining the beliefs and thinking of other people, do we rely on a theory of how people reason, or do we simulate their thinking by putting ourselves in their shoes? To conclude the module, we'll discuss self-knowledge, a topic that brings philosophy of mind and epistemology elegantly together: how do you know what you believe?

Preparatory Readings:

• Lemos, N., *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge.*

• Crane, T., *Elements of Mind*.

Assessment

Two parts:

(c) One 2000 word essay (50%)

(d) One 2000 word essay (50%)