

MA/Diploma Philosophy of Religion and Ethics

You will explore the key issues in the fields of Philosophy of Religion and Ethics – for example: Are there shared human values? How do we negotiate different belief systems in pluralistic societies? Is there a conflict between science and religion? Do people with different religious views have the same morals? Is life without God meaningless? You will be taught by a vibrant community of philosophers, pursuing original research on a wide range of topics on which expert supervision is available.

We also offer this programme by distance learning - for more information, see [Philosophy of Religion and Ethics MA \(Distance Learning\) \(/postgraduate/courses/distance/philosophy/philosophy-religion-ethics.aspx\)](http://postgraduate/courses/distance/philosophy/philosophy-religion-ethics.aspx).

[Study here and find out why the University of Birmingham was awarded The Times and The Sunday Times University of the Year 2013-14 \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/latest/2013/09/20-sep-Birmingham-announced-as-University-of-the-Year.aspx\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/latest/2013/09/20-sep-Birmingham-announced-as-University-of-the-Year.aspx)

Course fact file

Type of Course: Taught

Study Options: Full time, part time

Duration: 1 year full-time, 2 years part-time

Start date: September

Related courses

[MA Philosophy of Religion and Ethics \(Distance Learning\) \(/postgraduate/courses/distance/philosophy/philosophy-religion-ethics.aspx\)](http://postgraduate/courses/distance/philosophy/philosophy-religion-ethics.aspx)

[MA Philosophy of Mind and Cognitive Science \(/postgraduate/courses/taught/phil/phil-mind-cognitive-sci.aspx\)](http://postgraduate/courses/taught/phil/phil-mind-cognitive-sci.aspx)

[Philosophy of Health and Happiness module \(/postgraduate/courses/cpd/phil/philosophy-health-happiness.aspx\)](http://postgraduate/courses/cpd/phil/philosophy-health-happiness.aspx)

Contact

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[Department of Theology and Religion \(/schools/ptr/departments/theologyandreligion/index.aspx\)](http://schools/ptr/departments/theologyandreligion/index.aspx)

Details

You will study six modules in total, three of which are core Philosophy modules (see Modules tab for descriptions):

- Research Skills and Methods
- God, Freedom and the Meaning of Life
- Global Ethics or Bioethics

Your remaining three modules are optional, and can be chosen from within Philosophy, Theology and/or Religion. Modules available include:

- Classical Problems in the Philosophy of Religion
- Islamic Philosophy
- Problems of Religious Diversity
- Human Rights
- Metaphysics
- Philosophy of Health and Happiness
- Philosophy of Mind
- Value of Life
- Research Seminar

MA students will also complete a 15,000-word dissertation.

Modules

You will study three core modules as follows.

Both of:

Research Skills and Methods

This module is an introduction to the methods of contemporary philosophy. It identifies key philosophical reasoning tools and styles of argument, providing opportunity to apply these to classical philosophical debates. It also highlights the great variety of philosophical theorising on offer by contrasting so-called 'armchair' and empirically-informed philosophy, as well as theoretical and applied philosophy. Throughout there will be an emphasis on honing essential practical skills, namely reading and writing philosophy at postgraduate level. This module will also be useful as a basic refresher course for those who have studied some philosophy already. The sessions are taught by a member of the Department of Philosophy, focusing on discipline-specific topics.

God, Freedom and the Meaning of Life

The module provides an introduction to a number of philosophical issues that have a relevance to the philosophy of religion, such as: Are there sound arguments for/against the existence of God? Is freedom compatible with God's foreknowledge? Why is there something rather than nothing? Is life meaningless without God? Can there be morality without God?

Plus, one of

Global Ethics I

This module aims to introduce you to key concepts and debates in global ethics. First, we will explore several prominent traditions in ethical theory; next we will apply these normative ethical theories to concrete ethical questions. In investigating these theories and applications, you will be encouraged to question your presumptions about the nature of ethics and moral values. The module also develops critical reasoning and argumentative skills through philosophical discussion and writing. The theoretical tools of analysis and argument can be applied in all aspects of global ethics.

Bioethics

This module introduces you to the increasing number of dilemmas in bioethics that cross national boundaries and transcend domestic regulation. Bioethical dilemmas, whether arising from scientific and technological developments or from the research practices of pharmaceutical companies, raise issues which cannot be effectively addressed at national or regional levels. Bioethics clearly calls for global solutions to what are global dilemmas and you will be introduced to some of the key bioethical issues which arise in the contemporary global context.

You will also choose three optional modules from within Philosophy, Theology and/or Religion. Modules available include:

Human Rights

This module introduces you to the contemporary philosophical debates about human rights. It focuses more on human rights understood as moral rights, rather than as legal rights written in international law. We will begin from the very basic question of what human rights are. We will also consider questions such as 'What kind of human rights are there?', 'Which beings can have human rights?', 'Are human rights inalienable?', and 'What happens when human rights conflict?'. The first half of the module focuses on exploring different philosophical justifications for human rights; we will cover justifications based on the dignity of human agency, international politics, and human flourishing. The second half of the module will focus on philosophical debates about the nature of specific human rights - looking first at some general rights, for autonomy, liberty and wellbeing, and then at more concrete rights to life and privacy. We will also consider objections to human rights based on relativist and utilitarian views in ethics.

Metaphysics

In this module you will investigate a range of advanced topics in contemporary metaphysics. We will begin by looking at metaphysical issues relating to ourselves: personal identity and free will. We'll then move to a more fundamental metaphysical debate, realism versus anti-realism, before looking at two specific topics which have become very popular in recent years: the metaphysics of possibility and the metaphysics of persistence through time.

Philosophy of Health and Happiness

The module will examine debates at the forefront of current research in the philosophy of health and happiness. You will explore conceptual problems (e.g. what 'health' and 'disease' are) and question contemporary lifestyle issues (for instance, regarding how health, happiness and meaning relate, as well as whether there is a correlation between income and life satisfaction). You will also be asked to consider how technological advances (such as those in genetics) are changing these understandings.

From 2013/14 onwards, this module will be **accredited for CPD (<http://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/cpd>)** by the Royal College of Physicians (equivalent to 10 category 1 credits).

Philosophy of Mind

What is the place of consciousness in nature? Will we ever understand it in a 'scientific' way? What about thinking in general? Are human minds, essentially, grey wet computers, or do we need altogether distinctive conceptual resources to understand them? These kinds of questions have concerned philosophers of mind for centuries, and in this module we'll address a range that are central to contemporary debates. We begin with the metaphysical question of whether consciousness can be accommodated in a 'physicalist' world view, examining the difficulties faced by various different attempts to analyse it in physical ('scientific') terms. We then move to some fundamental questions about mental states in general: Are they located inside people's heads? Can they be understood in purely descriptive terms, or are they (like moral and other evaluative properties are often held to be) in some sense essentially 'normative'?

Value of Life

This module is intended to provide scope for an assessment of that brand of extreme philosophical pessimism according to which life not only has no positive value but is something we should be better off without – that, to echo the title of a recent book by David Benatar, it is “better never to have been”. The initial focus will be on the arguments for this view put forward recently by Benatar himself and before him by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). The focus will then shift to the more affirmative approaches of thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and William James (1842-1910). An important subsidiary theme will be the nature of pleasure, pain, happiness and suffering.

Classical Problems in the Philosophy of Religion

Description to follow

Islamic Philosophy

Description to follow

Problems of Religious Diversity

Description to follow

Research Seminar

This is an innovative module which replicates the experience of being a professional academic. You will attend the PhilSoc and choose a topic from those discussed at the seminar. You will then write your own paper on that topic, which is assessed by members of staff as if it was going through the 'peer-review' process for acceptance to an academic journal. You will then present your paper in the Postgraduate Seminar and rewrite it according to the comments. This module provides a unique and invaluable experience for students considering continuing in academia.

Fees and funding

We charge an annual tuition fee. Fees for 2015/16 are as follows:

- Home / EU: £6,210 full-time; £3,105 part-time
- Overseas: £14,140 full-time

For part-time students, the above fee quoted is for year one only and tuition fees will also be payable in year two of your programme.

Eligibility for Home/EU or Overseas fees can be verified with Admissions. Learn more about **[fees for international students](#)**

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/International/students/finance/fees.aspx>)

Tuition fees can either be paid in full or by instalments. Learn more about [postgraduate tuition fees and funding \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/postgraduate/pgt-fees/index.aspx\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/postgraduate/pgt-fees/index.aspx).

Alumni Bursary

The University of Birmingham is offering awards of ?2,000 to outstanding alumni wishing to undertake Masters study at the University during 2015. There are 50 awards available and applications for the bursary must be submitted by 17:00 on 31 March 2015. Full details and how to apply can be found on the [Distinguished Alumni Scholarship page \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/postgraduate/funding/Distinguished-Alumni-Scholarship-scheme.aspx\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/postgraduate/funding/Distinguished-Alumni-Scholarship-scheme.aspx).

Scholarships and studentships

Scholarships to cover fees and/or maintenance costs may be available. To discover whether you are eligible for any award across the University, and to start your funding application, please visit the University's [Postgraduate Funding Database \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/fees/funding/FundingFilter.aspx\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/fees/funding/FundingFilter.aspx).

International students can often gain funding through overseas research scholarships, Commonwealth scholarships or their home government.

Entry requirements

The normal entrance requirement is an upper second-class Honours degree in a relevant discipline (to be determined by the Admissions Tutor - usually Philosophy, Theology or Religious Studies).

Additional information: Other qualifications are considered - learn more about [entry requirements \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/ug/requirements\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/ug/requirements)

How to apply

Before you make your application

You may wish to [register your interest with us \(https://bham.hobsons.co.uk/emtinterestpage.aspx?ip=postgraduate\)](https://bham.hobsons.co.uk/emtinterestpage.aspx?ip=postgraduate) to receive regular news and updates on postgraduate life within this Department and the wider University.

Making your application

When clicking on the Apply Now button you will be directed to an application specifically designed for the programme you wish to apply for where you will create an account with the University application system and submit your application and supporting documents online. Further information regarding how to apply online can be found on the [How to apply pages \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/postgraduate/apply-pg/index.aspx\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/postgraduate/apply-pg/index.aspx)

[Apply now \(https://pga.bham.ac.uk/lpages/CAL102.htm\)](https://pga.bham.ac.uk/lpages/CAL102.htm)

Related links

[Postgraduate funding - Department of Philosophy \(/schools/ptr/departments/philosophy/postgraduate/funding.aspx\)](/schools/ptr/departments/philosophy/postgraduate/funding.aspx)

Related news and events

[Video: Closer to Truth \(/schools/ptr/departments/philosophy/news/2013/closer.aspx\)](/schools/ptr/departments/philosophy/news/2013/closer.aspx)

Learning and teaching

You will be taught by a vibrant community of philosophers, pursuing original research on a wide range of topics on which expert supervision is available, including philosophy of religion, theology, ethics, metaethics and global ethics.

You will participate in a weekly [Postgraduate Seminar \(/schools/ptr/departments/philosophy/research/seminars/index.aspx\)](/schools/ptr/departments/philosophy/research/seminars/index.aspx) and in the regular meetings of PhilSoc and the Staff Seminar.

You will also become part of, and contribute to, the vibrant international community of the College of Arts and Law Graduate School, which offers dedicated research resources and a supportive working environment. Our team of academic and operational staff are on hand to offer support and advice to all postgraduate students within the College.

Support with academic writing

As a postgraduate student in the College of Arts and Law, you have access to the [Academic Writing Advisory Service \(AWAS\) \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/colleges/artslaw/student-experience/opportunities/awas/index.aspx\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/colleges/artslaw/student-experience/opportunities/awas/index.aspx) which aims to help your transition from undergraduate to taught Masters level, or back into academia after time away. The service offers guidance on writing assignments and dissertations for your MA/MSc programme with individual support from an academic writing advisor via tutorials, email and the provision of online materials.

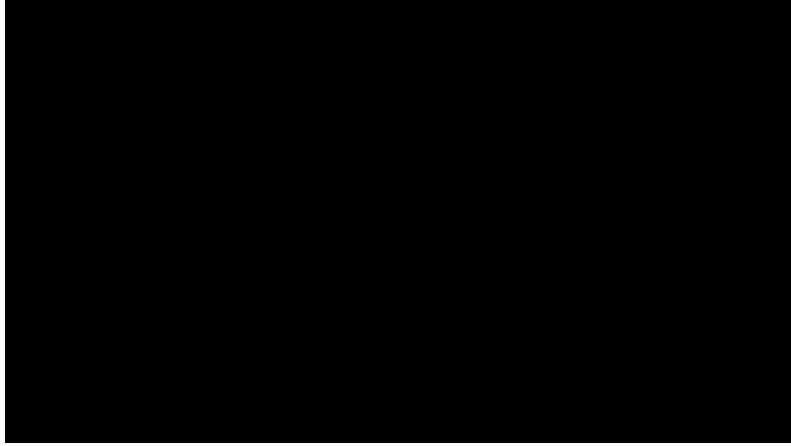
International students can access support through the [English for International Students Unit \(EISU\) \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/eisu/inseasonal/index.aspx\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/eisu/inseasonal/index.aspx).

Related staff

Employability

The University of Birmingham has been ranked 8th in the UK and 60th in the world for post-qualification employability in the latest global survey of universities commissioned by the International Herald Tribune.

Your degree will provide excellent preparation for employment and this will be further enhanced by the employability skills training offered through the College of Arts and Law Graduate School.



Birmingham's Philosophy postgraduates develop a range of skills that are highly desirable in the job market, including: articulacy; precise analytical thought; clarity; rigour in formulating complex problems; and the ability to analyse and construct sound arguments.

Over the past five years, over 93% of Philosophy postgraduates were in work and/or further study six months after graduation. Due to the transferable nature of their skills, Philosophy postgraduates traditionally enter a wide range of employment areas, from the Civil Service to finance. Employers that graduates have gone on to work for include: Afrikids (child rights organisation); Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust; Muslim Scout Fellowship; Rights and Humanity; University of Birmingham; and University of Edinburgh.