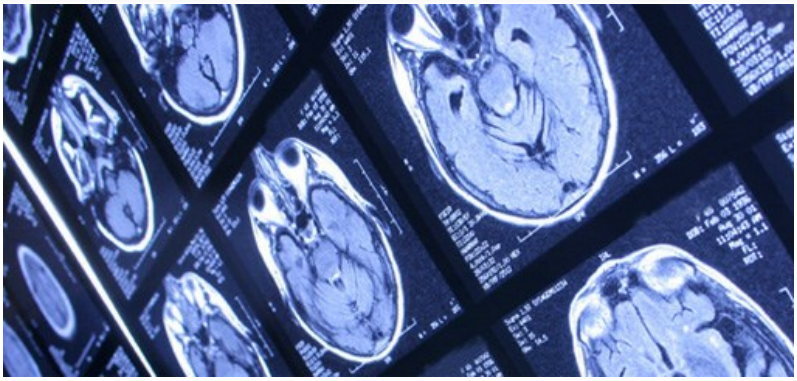
University of Birmingham

MA Philosophy



On this programme you will be able to choose from a variety of modules covering key areas in Philosophy. These include: philosophy of mind and cognitive science; ethics, metaethics and global ethics; epistemology and metaphysics; philosophy of language; philosophy of health and happiness; value of life. 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. This programme can also be used as a route into PhD research.

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 Mind and Cognitive Science (/postgraduate/courses/taught/phil/phil-mind-cognitive-sci.aspx)

MA Philosophy of Health and Happiness (/postgraduate/courses/taught/phil/phil-health-happiness.aspx)

Philosophy of Health and Happiness module (/postgraduate/courses/cpd/phil/philosophy-health-happiness.aspx)

Contact

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School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion (/schools/ptr/index.aspx)

Department of Philosophy (/schools/ptr/departments/philosophy/index.aspx)

Details

You will take a core research skills module and then select five modules from a range of options offered by Philosophy (including the Centre for the Study of Global Ethics) and other departments.

Available modules within Philosophy include:

- Bioethics
- Epistemology
- Global Ethics I
- Global Ethics II
- God, Freedom and the Meaning of Life
- Human Rights
- Metaphysics
- Philosophy of Cognitive Science
- Philosophy of Health and Happiness
- Philosophy of Language
- Philosophy and Mental Health
- Philosophy of Mind
- Research Seminar

You will also complete a 15,000-word dissertation.

Modules

You will study one core module:

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.

You will also choose optional modules from a range which includes:

Bioethics

Bioethics is the study of ethical issues arising surrounding issues of life and death, especially those involved in the life sciences, health care, scientific research, and the beginning and end of life. This module introduces you to the key debates surrounding a number of theoretical and practical issues in bioethics, including but not limited to those that are transnational in nature. By the end of the module, you should: be familiar with major ethical theories and their application to specific issues in bioethics; be able to identify, explicate, and evaluate arguments related to bioethical problems; be able to think and write clearly about the normative issues involved in the beginning and end of life; and be able to morally evaluate the potential changes to human life that new technologies provide.

Epistemology

Mind and world often relate to one another in ways that are good from a cognitive point of view. We often perceive how the world truly is, for instance, and then come to know it to be the way that we perceive it to be – and in the midst of all this we formulate an understanding of the world on the basis of very strong evidence. It is obvious that each of these ways that mind and world relate are good from a cognitive point of view. Indeed they are how we would wish our minds to hook up to the world all the time. Yet it is unclear how it is possible that mind and world relate to one another in any of these cognitively good ways. The Epistemology module thus looks at recent philosophical discussion of knowledge, perception and reason, with each of our readings being drawn from the 2nd edition of Contemporary Debates in Epistemology (edited by Steup, Turri and Sosa).

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.

Global Ethics II

This module develops your understanding of key global ethical issues, in particular human rights, poverty, distributive justice, cosmopolitan democracy, governance and humanitarian intervention.

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?

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 Cognitive Science

This module covers key topics in the Philosophy of Cognitive Science. We will start off with traditional topics which provide insight into the conceptual foundations of cognitive science. In particular, we will look at: the distinction between personal and sub-personal levels of explanation, the Computational Theory of Mind, modularity and, if we have time, Connectionism. Against this background, our discussion will turn to more contemporary topics, with an emphasis on methodological worries about current theorising in cognitive science and neuroscience. Specifically, we will focus on a selection of topics such as the scientific study of consciousness, delusions and rationality, the use of double dissociation arguments in cognitive neuropsychology, and the question of what fMRI can tell us about the mind.

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.

Philosophy of Language

This module covers a range of advanced topics in analytic philosophy of language and its overlap with the realism/antirealism debate in metaphysics. In any given year, some of the following topics will be addressed in detail: Frege's distinction between sense and reference; Russell's theory of definite descriptions; logical positivism and the verification principle; Quine on analyticity and translation; Kripke's Wittgenstein on rule-following; Grice's theory of meaning; Davidson's programme; Dummett's attack on realism.

Philosophy and Mental Health

The module provides an overview of contemporary debates in philosophy and mental health. In each seminar a new issue will be investigated, but there will be three interrelated threads throughout the module. One is about the nature of psychiatry. The second is about the sense in which psychiatric disorders are disorders of the self. The third is about how we should respond to people with psychiatric disorders, considered from a wide range of perspectives, including interpersonal, clinical, ethical, legal and public health policy. These themes will be addressed by reference to different aspects of psychiatry (e.g. classification, diagnosis, aetiology, research, treatment), different psychiatric disorders (e.g. addiction, anorexia, dementia, dissociation, schizophrenia, personality disorders, psychopathy), and different disciplinary frameworks. The course will also have a practical element involving structured, outcome-focused deliberation about difficult cases highlighting these threads and their inter-relations.

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'?

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 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)** .

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)** .

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

Birmingham Masters Scholarship Scheme

For 2015 entry the University has **224 new £10,000 scholarships available for Masters students from under-represented groups (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/postgraduate/funding/Birmingham-Masters-Scholarship-Scheme.aspx)** . These scholarships have been jointly funded by the British Government; the allocation of the awards, which is the fourth highest in the UK, further cements Birmingham?s place amongst the very best higher education institutions for postgraduate study. The application deadline is 31 July 2015.

Entry requirements

The programme allows for multi-disciplinary entry. You need an upper second-class Honours degree, or equivalent, in Philosophy or another relevant subject (e.g. Politics, Linguistics, Theology, Sociology, Law) or a Joint Honours degree of which Philosophy or another relevant subject is a component.

Learn more about **entry requirements (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/requirements/requirements-pg/index.aspx)**

International students

Academic requirements

We accept a range of qualifications; our **country pages (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/international/students/country/index.aspx)** show you what qualifications we accept from your country.

English language requirements

You can satisfy our English language requirements in two ways:

- by holding an **English language qualification (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/requirements/requirements-pg/international/index.aspx)** to the right level
- by taking and successfully completing one of our **English courses for international students (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/requirements/requirements-pg/international/english-courses.aspx)**

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)** 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)**

Apply now (https://pga.bham.ac.uk/lpages/CAL098.htm)

Related links

Postgraduate funding - Department of Philosophy (/schools/ptr/departments/philosophy/postgraduate/funding.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 ethics, metaethics and global ethics; epistemology and metaphysics; philosophy of mind and cognitive science; philosophy of language; the philosophy of health and happiness; and the philosophy of religion. You will participate in a weekly Postgraduate Seminar 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)** 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/insessional/index.aspx)** .

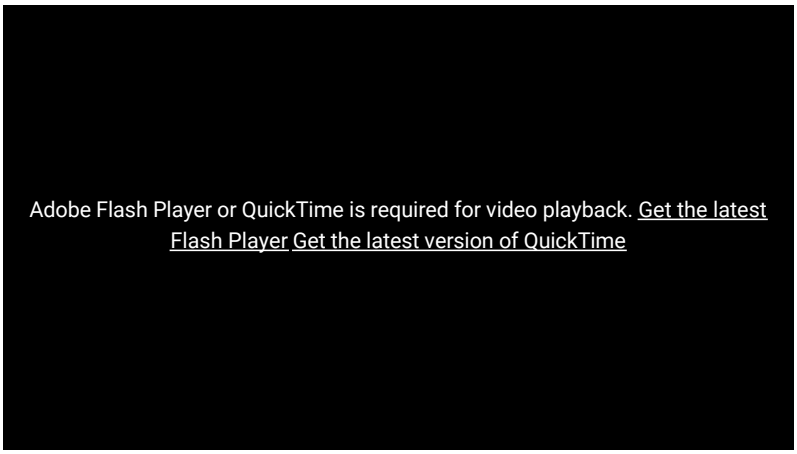
Related staff

Dr Jussi Suikkanen (/staff/profiles/philosophy/suikkanen-jussi.aspx)

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.

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