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Philosophy undergraduate modules

Module descriptions for the following programmes:

- **BA Philosophy (/undergraduate/courses/phil/philosophy.aspx)**
- **BA Philosophy of Religion and Ethics (/undergraduate/courses/phil/philosophy-religion-ethics.aspx)**

Open all sections

Individual and Society A&B

Covers areas of moral and political philosophy, addressing questions such as whether moral facts are like scientific or mathematical facts; how we should resolve moral disagreements; theories concerning how we are to act; what the nature of political authority is; and what the justifications are for having a government.

History of Philosophy A&B

This course introduces the students to the history of philosophy, and the philosophical topics that have been discussed in the past, to give a sound grounding in the contemporary issues. Philosophers such as Locke, Leibniz, Descartes, Aristotle and Plato have all been covered on this module in previous years.

Knowledge and Reality A&B

This module introduces students to contemporary epistemology and metaphysics. The epistemology portion covers such topics as what knowledge is; how we are justified in believing things; and how inductive knowledge works. The metaphysics portion covers such topics as the existence of God; the existence of abstract things such as properties; whether we have free will or not; and the nature of consciousness.

Logic A&B

This module gives students an introduction to logic. It will teach you how to carry out natural deduction in both propositional and predicate logic; create truth tables; and includes some practical applications of logic.

Philosophical Texts and Methods/Independent Study

This module equips students with the research and essay writing skills for studying philosophy at undergraduate level. In the first semester tutorials focus on putting those skills into practice with a range of selected philosophical topics, whilst in the second semester students select a philosophical topic of their own to produce a single assessed essay on.

Second Year

Meta-Ethics

This module introduces some of the main themes and issues in 20th century and contemporary analytic metaethics.

Philosophy of Mind

This module introduces central issues in contemporary philosophy of mind, focusing on the problem of whether our mental experience, especially its subjective character, can be incorporated into the naturalistic, scientific picture of the world.

Spinoza

After presenting a general historical background which stresses the new philosophical problems generated by the rise of modern natural science in the context of traditional conceptions of substance, the module covers the five parts of Spinoza's Ethics.

Philosophical Texts II

Continuing from Philosophical Texts and Methods in the first year, this module consists of weekly seminars with a member of staff for in-depth discussion of one selected text. No use of secondary material is envisaged, to encourage close engagement with the selected texts.

Philosophy of Science

This will be an exploration of fundamental philosophical issues raised by the practice of science. It will cover issues in scientific methodology, scientific knowledge, the language of science, the relation between scientific theories and reality, the rationality of science and progress and the relation between science and society.

Contemporary Political Philosophy

This module will examine contemporary political philosophy. This module will explore different aspects of one of the most important debates in the contemporary political philosophy. It begins from John Rawls's seminal account of justice which understands justice as fairness. This view of justice emphasises: (i) the protection of basic civil liberties, (ii) the creation of fair equality of opportunity, and (iii) the redistribution of wealth and income to maximally benefit the economically worst off. Rawls argues for this conception of justice both by relying on our prior intuitions about justice, and by using a sophisticated argument based on a hypothetical social contract.

The module will then critically examine the following important responses to Rawls:

a) G.A. Cohen's left-wing criticism according to which Rawls's theory leaves too much room for objectionable inequality-creating incentives.

b) Robert Nozick's right-wing criticism according to which Rawls's theory fails to respect our ownership rights to ourselves and to the products of our labour. At this point, we will also consider both Nozick's own version of libertarianism (the so-called historical entitlement theory of justice), and Philippe Van Parijs's left-libertarian view.

c) Ronald Dworkin's alternative version of liberal egalitarianism which concentrates on both the equality of resources and personal responsibility.

d) Elizabeth Anderson's general objections to luck egalitarianism.

e) Susan Moller Okin's feminist view according to which the scope of Rawls's theory should be extended to the personal sphere of families.

Will Kymlicka's proposal according to which liberal egalitarian theories should be able to accord certain special protections to certain minority cultures.

Thought and Language

This module builds on the skills students learnt in Logic A&B at first year. Topics include the nature of logical consequence; questions concerning which logical system is the correct system; modal reasoning; and how we should interpret conditional statements.

Independent Study II

As with Independent Study I, students select a philosophical topic of their own for independent research. Throughout the module, students receive lectures on essay writing skills; starting research projects and how to carry out a research project.

Topics in the History of Philosophy

Currently this module focuses on the extreme form of seventeenth century rationalism developed by Benedict Spinoza in his main work, the *Ethics*. Topics included: substance, mind and body, knowledge, emotion, virtue, freedom and necessity.

Final year

Issues in Contemporary Metaphysics

The focus of the course will be on some of the most original and influential views and arguments in 20th Century Metaphysics. The topics covered are: personal identity; free will; realism and nominalism; and persistence over time.

Personhood and Freedom of the Will

This module concentrates on the metaphysical issues in personal identity and whether or not we have free will.

Philosophy of Religion

The questions we will discuss in this module include whether God created the universe; proofs for the existence of God; the compatibility of divine foreknowledge with human freedom; and whether there is a conflict between science and religion.

Philosophy of Psychology

The module focuses on the nature of delusions, and examines the interplay between philosophical theories of the mind and data from psychology and psychiatry on the following thematic areas: human rationality, the nature of beliefs and self-knowledge.

Philosophy of Language

Language is a phenomenally important and powerful device that lies at the heart of human life. (Try to imagine what life would be like without it.) Yet it is utterly perplexing. In the majority of cases in which you hear or read a sentence (or for that matter, say or write one) the sentence is one you have never encountered before; and yet you understand these sentences with virtually no effort. How does this work? What are linguistic expressions' 'meanings', and what is it to understand them? These questions dominated later 20th century analytic philosophy, and candidate answers to them contribute not only to the philosophy of language itself, but also to metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, ethics and many other areas of philosophy.

Although we'll begin with an examination of accounts of meaning associated with Russell and Frege (and in much less detail, Locke and Mill), our approach throughout the module will be problem-based rather than historical. In the first half of the module our main focus will be on the notion of *reference* - the relation between a particular word and the worldly thing it 'picks out'. In the second half we'll focus on more general issues to do with speakers' understanding and uses of whole languages.

Schopenhauer

This module explores the way in which Schopenhauer developed the transcendental idealism of Kant into a comprehensive metaphysics.

Virtue Ethics

This module will focus on one approach to normative ethics: virtue ethics. The module will introduce students to criticisms of other major forms of normative theory, specifically deontology and utilitarianism.

Global Bioethics

This course introduces students to the increasing number of dilemmas in bioethics that cross national boundaries and transcend domestic regulation.

Philosophical Project

This module allows you to conduct independent research into and write on a particular philosophical issue of your choice, with assistance from a project supervisor with expertise in your chosen topic.

Sex, Ethics and Philosophy

This module covers issues in the Philosophy and Ethics of sex, including some of: liberal versus 'traditional' understandings of the function of sex; the harm principle; consent and competence to give it; what laws the state should/may impose relating to sex; the permissibility of contraception, homosexuality, pornography and prostitution. The module employs the topic of sex as a route into fundamental issues in ethics and philosophy concerning liberalism, the law, the nature of ethics and related issues.

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