# **Department of Philosophy**

# Module descriptions 2024/25

# Level C (i.e. normally 1st 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**

## Philosophical Traditions

***MODULE CODE:*** 32793

***CREDIT VALUE:*** 20

***ASSESSMENT METHOD:*** 1 x 1500 word essay (50%) and 1 x 1500 word essay (50%)

***SEMESTER:*** 1

***DESCRIPTION***

Most modules taught at philosophy departments in the UK examine the views of contemporary philosophers working in the ‘analytic tradition’. This module breaks this tradition and gives an introduction to alternative views. It also provides students with a taste of different – sometimes less conventional - approaches. The different traditions of doing philosophy that can be discussed on this module include both different historical approaches (including Pre-Socratic and Classical Philosophy, Medieval Philosophy, Early Modern Philosophy, Post Kantian Philosophy) and traditions from different cultures (including Continental Philosophy and various traditions in Eastern Philosophy, African and Latin American Philosophy). Because the module is research-led and because there are so many different traditions, each year the exact content will vary depending upon the module convenor. Normally, the module will focus on one or two traditions in depth. The aim of the module is to introduce to the students the historical and cultural contexts of the relevant traditions, their key figures and texts, and their main questions and central views.

## Art of Persuasion A: Propaganda and Public Discourse

***MODULE CODE:*** 33079

***CREDIT VALUE:*** 10

***ASSESSMENT METHOD:*** 2 x on-line Canvas quiz (each worth 50% of final module mark)

***SEMESTER:*** 1

***DESCRIPTION***

Modern life bombards us with information meant to convince and persuade. According to some recent work in philosophy we have indeed come to live in a ‘post-truth era’, an era in which the truth of messages has become far less important than the intentions of the messenger. This module investigates phenomena such as fake news, ‘bullshit’, and propaganda. On the basis of analysis of current events as well as iconic examples in public discourse, the aim of the module is to develop students’ awareness of the modes of persuasion central in these phenomena and critical reasoning skills to counteract them.

## Philosopher’s Toolkit A

***MODULE CODE:*** 33081

***CREDIT VALUE:*** 20

***ASSESSMENT METHOD:*** 2 x on-line Canvas quiz (each worth 50% of final module mark)

***SEMESTER:*** 1

**DESCRIPTION**

An introduction to some of the most important methodological devices encountered in philosophy. We begin with the canonical notion of a cogent *argument,* and then move to cover a range of other important abstract concepts that pervade philosophy, e.g. *analysis, explanation, probability, necessity, reflective equilibrium,* etc. Working through a series of illustrative applications, we excavate abstract notions that are foundational to moral, political and applied philosophy as well as to ‘theoretical’ philosophy.

In the second half of the module we return to arguments, and learn to use formal apparatuses – *logics* – to study them in detail. Students learn to translate English sentences into formulas of logical symbolism, and to assess the validity of arguments couched in those formal terms.

## Problems of Philosophy A

***MODULE CODE:*** 33817

***CREDIT VALUE:*** 10

***ASSESSMENT METHOD:*** 1 x on-line Canvas quiz (50% of final module mark) and 1 x 1000 word essay (50% of final module mark)

***SEMESTER:*** 1

**Please note: You can only take this module if you are studying with us for the full year. You must also take Problems of Philosophy B in semester 2.**

***DESCRIPTION***

Together with Problems of Philosophy B, this module introduces a range of key philosophical problems most of which practically everyone with a philosophical temperament has puzzled over before. Philosophy students will grapple with many of these again later in their degree, and throughout their degree, module convenors will presuppose at least some familiarity with these topics. The module also facilitates the acquisition of key philosophical study skills such as essay-writing.

The philosophical topics covered in Problems of Philosophy A are four of the following:

* Scepticism (how can I know anything at all about the world?)
* Free will (how can I think and act freely, if all my thoughts and actions are determined by the laws that govern the Universe?)
* The existence of God (does S/He exist?)
* Realism vs antirealism (to what extent is reality distinct from how it appears?)
* The mind/body problem (is the mind just the brain?)
* Personal identity (what is it about you that makes you the same person as you were years ago?)
* Utilitarianism vs. Deontology (are actions morally right and wrong ‘in themselves’, or are they so just because of the effects they have on people’s happiness, etc.?)
* Ethical obligation (how much should we help people much worse-off than ourselves?)
* Moral relativism (are moral values absolute or do they vary from one culture/person to others?)
* The requirements of justice (Who should have what?)

## Philosopher’s Toolkit B

***MODULE CODE:*** 33084

***CREDIT VALUE:*** 20

 ***ASSESSMENT METHOD:*** 2 x on-line Canvas quiz (each worth 50% of final module mark)

 ***SEMESTER:*** 1

***DESCRIPTION***

An introduction to some of the most important methodological devices encountered in philosophy. We begin with the canonical notion of a cogent *argument,* and then move to cover a range of other important abstract concepts that pervade philosophy e.g. *analysis, explanation, probability, necessity, reflective equilibrium,* etc. Working through a series of illustrative applications, we excavate abstract notions that are foundational to moral, political and applied philosophy as well as to ‘theoretical’ philosophy.

In the second half of the module we return to arguments, and learn to understand important aspects of *logics*, the formal apparatuses which are used to evaluate arguments. Students learn to translate English sentences into formulas of logical symbolism and through those translations, to understand important structural features of both every day and philosophical language.

# **SEMESTER 2 MODULES**

## Art of Persuasion B: Philosophical Texts

***MODULE CODE:*** 33080

***CREDIT VALUE:*** 10

***ASSESSMENT METHOD:*** 1 x 1000 word take home exam (30%) and 1 x 1500 word essay (70%)

***SEMESTER:*** 2

***DESCRIPTION***

In this module students meet in a weekly seminar with a member of staff for in-depth discussion of one selected text and discuss the text and develop their responses. Each of the texts on offer will be engaging and accessible and will explore a key area of philosophy. On completion of this module the student will be able to engage closely with a modern work of Philosophy, extract from it the essential arguments, and produce a critical evaluation of them.

In addition to the weekly seminars there will be two lectures focused on reading philosophy and analysis of it.

## Problems of Philosophy B

***MODULE CODE:*** 33820

***CREDIT VALUE:*** 10

***ASSESSMENT METHOD:*** 1 x 90 minute written exam (100% of final module mark)

***SEMESTER:*** 2

**Please note: You can only take this module if you are studying with us for the full year. You must also take Problems of Philosophy A in semester 1.**

***DESCRIPTION***

Together with Problems of Philosophy A, this module introduces a range of key philosophical problems most of which practically everyone with a philosophical temperament has puzzled over before. Philosophy students will grapple with many of these again later in their degree, and throughout their degree, module convenors will presuppose at least some familiarity with these topics. The module also facilitates the acquisition and consolidation of collaborative and presentational skills.

The philosophical topics covered in Problems of Philosophy B are five of the following (not including the four covered by Problems of Philosophy A):

* Scepticism (how can I know anything at all about the world?)
* Free will (how can I think and act freely, if all my thoughts and actions are determined by the laws that govern the Universe?)
* The existence of God (does S/He exist?)
* Realism vs antirealism (to what extent is reality distinct from how it appears?)
* The mind/body problem (is the mind just the brain?)
* Personal identity (what is it about you that makes you the same person as you were years ago?)
* Utilitarianism vs. Deontology (are actions morally right and wrong ‘in themselves’, or are they so just because of the effects they have on people’s happiness, etc.?)
* Ethical obligation (how much should we help people much worse-off than ourselves?)
* Moral relativism (are moral values absolute or do they vary from one culture/person to others?)
* The requirements of justice (Who should have what?)

## Moral and Political Philosophy

***MODULE CODE:*** 32792

***CREDIT VALUE:*** 20

***ASSESSMENT METHOD:*** Two 1500-word essay (each contributing 50% to the final module mark).

***SEMESTER:*** 2

***DESCRIPTION***

One half of this module is mainly concerned with normative ethical theories about what is the right thing to do, and what it is to be a good person. Theories covered in the module are likely to include consequentialist theories including utilitarianism, deontological theories including Kantianism and virtue-based approaches to ethics. The other half is concerned with the question of political obligation: whether there is such a thing as legitimate state power. This question will be approached by studying some of the major philosophers who have tried to provide a justification for state power, such as Plato, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. It will also look at some critiques of political obligation based on anarchism and/or feminism.

## Reasons to Believe

***MODULE CODE:*** 32794

***CREDIT VALUE:*** 20

***ASSESSMENT METHOD:*** 1 x 1500 word essay and 1 x 1 hour written unseen exam (each contributing 50% to the final module mark).

***SEMESTER:*** 2

***DESCRIPTION***

How should we decide what to believe, and what does it take for our beliefs to constitute *knowledge*? These questions belong primarily to *epistemology*, and the module covers some quintessential epistemological topics such as the characterisation of knowledge; scepticism, internalism vs. externalism, coherentism vs. foundationalism, perception, testimony and a priority. Another place to look for insights into knowledge is the *philosophy of science*, and so the module also includes a cursory introduction to the philosophical theory of scientific methodology.

One important category of beliefs that is especially difficult to understand in traditional epistemological (or philosophy of science) terms is *religious beliefs*. Some theists propose theoretical *arguments* for the existence of god; others maintain that religious belief is a matter not of argument but of *faith*. The module incorporates critical introductions to both of these approaches to religious belief.