MA Optional Modules 2016-17

This document is a list of optional modules available to MA students in 2016-17. With a small number of exceptions, any module scheduled before 6pm in 2016-17 will be scheduled after 6pm if it runs in 2017-18, and vice versa. For details, please consult the departmental office. Part-time students should plan accordingly!

For further information, please contact the Postgraduate Administrator, the MA Tutor, or the module coordinator (listed below).

Topics in Ancient Philosophy
Prof. Anthony Price

Spring, Fridays 6-8pm.

This year the topic will be Plato and Aristotle on pleasure. This broadly falls within ethics, but also within moral psychology and philosophy of mind. We shall start with Plato’s Republic (Book IX), continue with his Philebus, and proceed to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics (Books VII & X).

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:
- Plato, Republic IX 580d-588a (many good translations, use whatever you have);
- Plato, Philebus, tr. & com. Dorothea Frede (Hackett – the translation, but not notes or introduction, which are really needed for this difficult dialogue, comes in the Cooper Hackett compilation).
- Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics VII chs 11-14, X chs 1-6 (tr. Ross/Brown, in Oxford World Classics; or in Barnes/Kenny Aristotle’s Ethics, Princeton, with no notes but a useful index).
- The relevant chapter of any introduction to the Nicomachean Ethics (Jim Urmson, Blackwell’s; David Bostock, OUP; Gerald Hughes, Routledge; Michael Pakaluk, CUP); also Bostock, ‘Pleasure and Activity in Aristotle's Ethics’, Phronesis 33 (1988): 251-272.

Philosophy of Art
Dr. Stacie Friend

Spring, Mondays 2-4pm.

Is art a domain entirely autonomous from other aspects of our lives, such as religion or politics? Does it matter to the value or interpretation of an artwork who made it or why? Are immoral works of art less valuable as art? In this module we address such questions by focusing on our evaluation of art. Artworks may have different kinds of value: financial, sentimental, cognitive, historical, anthropological, ethical, political, and so on.
Yet we typically deny that an artwork is great solely because it costs a great deal or is very old. So what explains the value of art qua art? Since the eighteenth century philosophers have argued that a work’s quality turns on its aesthetic value, including its beauty, traditionally conceived as an autonomous value determined by our experience of the work’s perceptual or intrinsic features (a view known as ‘aesthetic empiricism’). More recently, the traditional view has come under attack by those who argue that the aesthetic or artistic value of an artwork cannot be separated from contextual considerations, including the artist’s intentions, the ethical character of the work, its potential to enhance our understanding of the world, and so forth. After some discussion of the nature of art, we consider arguments for the traditional view, and then examine several different objections to that view. We also look at alternative conceptions of the value of art.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:
- Helpful overviews of many of the topics covered in this module may be found in the Routledge Companion to Aesthetics, 3rd edition, edited by Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (Routledge, 2013).

Berkeley and Leibniz

Dr. Sarah Patterson

Spring, Tuesdays 2-4pm.

Berkeley and Leibniz were the originators of two of the most unusual philosophical systems of the Early Modern period. Berkeley (1685-1753) famously denied the reality of matter, claiming that nothing exists but minds and ideas. Leibniz (1646-1716) maintained that the world consists of an infinity of monads or ‘spiritual automata’, each perceiving the whole from its own point of view. He also, notoriously, claimed that the actual world is the best of all possible worlds. By placing these two thinkers in historical context, we will seek to understand how they developed and defended their seemingly counterintuitive views, and what we can learn from them today.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:
- Berkeley, Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous (1713)
- Leibniz, Monadology (1714)

The Biology of Evil

Prof. Ken Gemes

Autumn, Fridays 6-8pm.

In enlightenment rhetoric, as developed by philosophers such as Descartes and Kant, evil is typically configured as a species of error, a failure or misapplication of the faculty of reason. As such, evil is treatable, indeed it may be ultimately eradicated, through the ever
widening influence of education and the light of reason. In the 19th century a new medical/biological model of evil became prominent. On this model evil is seen as some kind of bodily infection which needs to be isolated or destroyed before it further infects the greater populace.

The first aim of this course is to trace the rise of this new model of evil and its embodiment in the 19th century discourse on degeneration. The second aim is to examine through case studies how elements of the discourse of degeneration were inflected in literature, philosophy and psychology.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:


**Fiction and Language**

Dr. Stacie Friend

*Autumn, Wednesdays 6-8pm.*

When we go to the bookstore to buy a novel, we look for the sign leading us to fiction; if we want a history of the twentieth century, we go to the non-fiction section. Given how common is our traffic with fictional narratives, it may come as a surprise that the concept of fiction has been the source of numerous philosophical puzzles. In this module we focus on puzzles in the philosophy of language. One is whether fiction is constituted by a special use of language. For example, when Jane Austen wrote, ‘Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence’, she does not seem to be referring to anyone or asserting anything that we are supposed to believe. So what exactly is she doing? And what are readers doing when they talk about fiction? The critic who writes ‘Emma Woodhouse is a well-drawn character’ appears to make a true claim, but how can that be if there is no Emma? In this module we consider debates over such topics as the interpretation of authorial utterance, the possibility of reference to fictional characters, and the truth of statements about fiction. We will start by working through some relevant background in the philosophy of language, before moving to the issues in fiction.

This module assumes some intermediate-level metaphysics; those without such a background are advised to contact the module coordinator before registering.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:

John Searle, ‘The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse’, *New Literary History* 6 (1975); also reprinted in numerous collections.

**Hegel**

Dr. Andrew Huddleston  
*Spring, Thursdays 6-8pm.*

In this course, we explore the philosophy of G.F.W. Hegel. We will spend half the course reading excerpts from Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit, the book he presented as the ‘introduction’ to his philosophical system. We will go on to consider material from Hegel’s ethics, his political philosophy, his aesthetics, and his philosophy of history. The course includes a combination of primary and secondary literature and will seek to provide a comprehensive introduction to this rich, but difficult thinker.

*Assessment:* One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

*Preliminary Reading:*
- Paul Redding, ‘Hegel’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*  
- Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (Routledge, 2005).

**The Idea of Freedom**

Dr. Michael Garnett  
*Autumn, Wednesdays 2-4pm.*

The focus of this module is the concept of political liberty. It explores each of the three major traditions of theorising freedom: the ‘negative’ tradition (in which freedom is understood as the absence of external obstacles), the ‘republican’ tradition (in which freedom is understood as independence from dominating power), and the ‘positive’ tradition (in which freedom is understood as the pursuit of a particular form of life), looking along the way at key figures such as Hobbes, Bentham, Rousseau, Hegel and Marx. It also goes on to consider broader political questions such as: What is the relation between freedom and poverty? Does subjection to propaganda reduce freedom and, if so, how? Can processes of enculturation and socialisation themselves be oppressive and undermining of freedom?

*Assessment:* One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

*Preliminary Reading:*

**The Philosophy of Kant**

Dr. Andrew Huddleston  
*Autumn, Tuesdays 2-4pm.*

In this module, we focus on the work of Immanuel Kant. We will consider his ‘Copernican turn’ in epistemology and metaphysics, his moral philosophy, and his aesthetics. Texts studied will include selections from his *Critique of Pure Reason,* his
Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals and his Critique of Judgment.

Assessment: Two essays, to a combined total of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:

- Those seeking a preliminary introduction to Kant may wish to consult Paul Guyer’s book Kant (Routledge, 2006), or Allen Wood’s book of the same title (Blackwell, 2005).

Advanced Topics in Metaphysics

Dr. Alex Grzankowski

Autumn, Thursdays 6-8pm.

This installment of Advanced Topics in Metaphysics will be a focused study of the metaphysics of intentionality and the metaphysics of intentional objects. When we think, we think about things. But what are the things about which we think? Some seem to be ordinary objects such as the Prime Minister but some seem to be extraordinary. We sometimes think about things that don’t exist such as Pegasus or about possible but non-actual things such as a golden mountain. Some of our acts of thinking seem to be directed upon propositions – I might think that it will rain tomorrow. In this module we will take up three main topics. First, the nature of what are apparently intentional relations. If to think is to enter into a relation with what we think about, we require relata for the relation. We, then, may need to countenance an array of “intentional objects”. Or, despite first appearances, perhaps to think about something isn’t to enter into a relation with something. Second, we will consider the nature of potential candidates for being intentional objects such as Meinongian objects, merely possible objects, and fictional objects. Finally, we will consider the nature of propositions. Are there any propositions? If there are, are they representational entities? Can they be reduced to any other category such as sets or properties or are they perhaps sui generis entities?

Assessment: Two essays, to a combined total of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:

- Crane, T. (2012). The Objects of Thought. OUP. Chapter 1

Philosophy of Mind

Dr. Sarah Patterson

Autumn, Wednesdays 6-8pm.

What are minds? What is the nature of thought, consciousness and sensory experience? Can they be explained in purely physical terms? Are there good reasons to think that our minds are in some way separate from our bodies? If so, how can our minds have effects in the physical world? In this course we will examine and evaluate some of the answers that philosophers have given to questions such as these.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding
Moral Responsibility
Dr. Michael Garnett

Autumn, Tuesdays 6-8pm.

The idea that people can be held accountable for their actions is central to much of our moral and political thinking. Yet a little reflection on it reveals some deep philosophical problems. We know that we are shaped, to a very large extent, by forces beyond our control, such as our culture, genes and upbringing. What room, if any, does this leave for personal responsibility? Our modern scientific conception sees human minds as in some way reducible to neurological states and events. What room does this leave for freewill, besides (perhaps) the operations of randomness? When we act, what we actually bring about depends not only on our intentions but also on the world outside and so, to a large extent, on luck. Can we be fully accountable for the results? This module explores contemporary research on these and other problems. It also considers the implications of these debates for our personal relationships (and attitudes such as indignation, resentment, gratitude, praise, blame and love), for our practices of punishment, and for our theories of distributive justice.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary reading:

The Philosophy of Nietzsche
Dr. Andrew Huddleston and Prof. Ken Gemes

Spring, Thursdays 2-4pm.

This course seeks to explain and examine Nietzsche’s philosophy, concentrating particularly on his critique of morality and his moral psychology. While focusing on Nietzsche’s texts, principally his On the Genealogy of Morality, we will be examining his key ideas including, the death of God, nihilism, life affirmation, the ascetic ideal, perspectivism, the will to power, the eternal recurrence, and his criticisms of the ascetic ideal, the will to truth and Judeo-Christian morality.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:
Philosophy, Business and Society
Prof. Hallvard Lillehammer

Spring, Tuesdays 6-8pm.

Business managers, civil servants, advertisers, sales representatives and employers are all practical philosophers. They may not think explicitly in terms of philosophical arguments and theories, but every strategic decision they make is based on philosophical assumptions that can be articulated and assessed. This module examines some of the central philosophical issues that arise in the course of professional life, including truth; manipulation; trust; freedom; integrity; responsibility; and detachment.

No prior philosophical training is required to take this module. Each topic will be introduced without theoretical prerequisites, and the discussion of each topic will be illustrated with concrete examples from actual professions and real life.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary reading:

Philosophy and Gender
Prof. Susan James and New Appointment

Spring, Thursdays 6-8pm.

This module will be in two parts. In the first part, the topic will be the history and current discussion of gendered conceptions of freedom, focusing on the question of how far the republican conception of freedom can take gender difference into account. We'll look at the historical use of the republican conception to defend the rights of women (e.g. by Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill). We'll then turn to issues surrounding the relation of dependence and independence in contemporary feminist debate. Topics will include: adaptive preferences; same-sex relationships and citizenship; complicity in oppression; and the ethic of care.

The topic for the second part has not yet been determined.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:

Philosophical Logic
Dr. Florian Steinberger

Autumn, Thursdays 2-4pm.
Any philosophy department worth its salt requires its students to take at least a first class in logic. The reason for this, it is usually claimed, is that logic is the science of “good reasoning” or of “correct inference”. Hence, studying logic is supposed to teach us to reason well and to properly evaluate the reasoning of others. But what exactly is the connection between logic and good reasoning? After all, logic is concerned with abstract relations of logical consequence between truth-bearers, whereas reasoning is a psychological process by which we form and revise attitudes like beliefs via mental acts like inferring. In what sense, then, can the former be a source of standards of good practice for the latter? This will be the guiding question of the course. In our examination of it, we will encounter a number of central issues in philosophical logic and in neighboring fields. Here are some examples: Is there but one correct logic, or might there be several? What form might a non-classical logic take? What form might a principle of rationality take? What is the relation between logic and subjective probability theory?

This module presupposes some familiarity with basic symbolic logic.

**Assessment:** Two essays, to a combined total of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies).

**Preliminary Reading:**


**Philosophy of Science**

Dr. Robert Northcott

*Spring, Wednesdays 2-4pm.*

We take our children to medical doctors rather than faith healers; we pay NASA rather than astrologers to send rockets to the moon; and no one’s volunteering for a return to medieval dentistry. But exactly what is it that makes science special? Answering this question turns out to be surprisingly tricky. In seeing why, we’ll look at scientific method, paradigm shifts, whether we should really believe in invisible entities like genes and Higgs bosons, and critiques of science from, e.g., feminists. We’ll look at other topics too: evolution versus creationism; why modern science only came into being recently and in the West; and in what sense science progresses. Along the way, finally, we’ll also cover a fair amount of history of science and indeed of science itself.

**Assessment:** One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

**Preliminary Reading:**


**Political Power**

Prof. Susan James

*Spring, Wednesdays 6-8pm.*

Some of the most pressing political questions we confront are about the nature and extent of political power.
What makes power political? For example, is there a defensible distinction between political and personal power?

Who (or what) exercises political power? Does political power lie, for instance, with sovereigns of states and state officials, or is it more widely distributed?

Is political power inherently violent or does it also take non-violent forms?

Can we distinguish political power from political authority, and what might we gain by doing so?

As these questions indicate, political power is not a free-standing notion, and a full investigation of it would have to take account of its relation to a range of political phenomena, including the state, sovereignty, legitimacy, ideology, discrimination, oppression and freedom. This would be a huge project, and the course does not aim to be comprehensive. In any given year we shall focus on a manageable set of interconnected questions related to political power, and will use a specific set of philosophical texts (some historical and some contemporary) to help us investigate them. We shall draw on our own experiences of political power to test and deepen our philosophical conclusions.

Assessment: One essay of around 3,500 words, with a maximum of 3700 words (excluding bibliographies)

Preliminary Reading:


Modules that are suspended in 2016-17 but likely to run again in 2017-18:

- Advanced Topics in Epistemology
- Evolution and Philosophy
- Morality, Nature and Evolution
- Philosophy of Psychology
- Philosophy of Science
- Twentieth Century Continental Philosophy