



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH  
School of Philosophy, Psychology  
and Language Sciences

**Philosophy Honours Courses  
2016/2017**

**SEMESTER 1**

**[Ancient Theories of Mind](#)**

**Course Organiser:** Inna Kupreeva

**Seminars:** Thursday 09:00-10:50

Introduction to the main theories of mind of Greek philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus and Stoics), with sessions on Pre-Socratics, Greek medical schools, and Neoplatonism. We shall consider questions of definition and structure of the soul, its main functions, the seat of the soul in the human body, the problem of mind and the mental; place of mind in the world.

**[Belief, Desire and Rational Choice](#)**

**Course Organiser:** Wolfgang Schwartz

**Seminars:** Monday 09:00-10:50

This course introduces the basics of contemporary decision theory, discusses general norms on rational belief and desire, and investigates whether decision theory can serve as a functionalist framework to define the concepts of (graded) belief and desire.

**[The Computational Mind](#)**

**Course Organiser:** Mark Sprevak

**Seminars:** Wednesday 09:00-10:50

Computation appears to be our best hope for explaining how the mind works. Over the past forty years, computational models have scored numerous successes in explaining various mental phenomena. Today, computation dominates cognitive science. This course introduces the computational approach to the mind and explores some foundational questions and challenges that it faces. Topics covered by the course include: What is a computation? If the mind is a computer, what kind is it? Is computation a real feature of brain, or a projection of our interests? Can consciousness be explained by computation? Are cognitive computations in the brain or do they spill into the environment?

**[The Early Continentals: Hegel and Nietzsche](#)**

**Course Organiser:** Dave Ward

**Lectures:** Friday 10:00-10:50 **Tutorials:** Friday (Group 1) 11:10-12:00 (Group 2) 12:10-13:00

This course will introduce students to the ideas of Hegel and Nietzsche, and examine the influence these thinkers had on the analytic and continental traditions in philosophy. The course will focus on reading and understanding key passages from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*. An important background figure on the course will be Kant, and we will begin by reading some important sections from his *Critique of Pure Reason*. We will compare and contrast the ways in which Hegel and Nietzsche both sought to articulate and overcome philosophical problems inherited from Kant. Where helpful, we will also take brief detours into the works of other thinkers who influenced or reacted to Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche, such as Fichte, Schelling and Schopenhauer. By the end of the course we will be in a position to appreciate and assess the historic trajectory of philosophical thought that runs from Kant through

Hegel and Nietzsche, and look ahead to the divergent paths this trajectory has taken in contemporary philosophy.

### [Feminism](#)

**Course Organiser: Elinor Mason**

**Seminars: Thursday 11:10-13:00**

In this course we will examine philosophical approaches to feminism and feminist issues. Topics covered may include inequality in the work place and in family structures; global feminism; the relationships between lesbian and feminist philosophy; issues around sex and sexuality, including the objectification of the female body, pornography and prostitution.

### [Food for Thought: The Ethics of Food Choices](#)

**Course Organiser: Anders Schoubye**

**Lectures: Wednesday 14:10-16:00**

The purpose of this course is to consider and discuss some of the ethical challenges related to current food production practices, food consumption, and food policies. The course will cover issues such as (a) the moral status of non-human animals, i.e. whether non-human animals have rights, (b) arguments in favor of adopting vegetarian or vegan diets, (c) environmental and health related costs of food production and the recent focus on local, organic, and "sustainable" foods, (d) food policy choices that have disproportionately negative impacts on minorities and children.

### [History of Analytic Philosophy](#)

**Course Organiser: Bryan Pickel**

**Lectures: Monday 12:10-14:00**

Towards the beginning of the twentieth century, a rich and influential tradition known as Analytic Philosophy emerged, which became predominate style of philosophy in the English speaking world. In this course, we will look at the early history of this movement, as reflected in the works of Frege, Russell, and Moore.

### [Kant's Critical Philosophy](#)

**Course Organiser: Alix Cohen**

**Seminars: Monday 14:10-16:00**

The work of the German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant continues to have an extraordinary influence in philosophy. As well as its contributions to metaphysics, epistemology, the philosophy of mind, and moral philosophy, it offers one of the most significant and intricate reflections on the nature of philosophy itself. This course provides an introduction to some of the central issues in Kant's philosophy. Its main objective is to engage the student in a critical and detailed analysis so as to gain a firm understanding of both the overall structure and the central theses of one of the most important works in the history of philosophy. It will highlight the role of Transcendental Philosophy in the wider context of Kant's philosophy as well as its importance for the further development of philosophy.

### [Knowledge, Ignorance and Power](#)

**Course Organiser: Aidan McGlynn**

**Seminars: Friday 11:10-13.00**

This course will introduce and examine a range of topics at the intersection of epistemology and political/social/feminist philosophy, examining our actual epistemic practices in light of the relations of power and subordination that exist between differently placed groups in society, and looking at different proposals for how this should shape our theorizing about knowledge and ignorance.

### [Meta-Ethics](#)

**Course Organiser: Debbie Roberts**

**Seminars: Monday 14:10-16:00**

If ethics is the general investigation of what is right/wrong, good/bad, what one may/ought to do, etc. then metaethics is the investigation of the nature of ethical judgments and facts. This involves questions about: (i) the objectivity and psychology of ethical judgment, (ii) the existence, nature and knowability of ethical facts, and (iii) the meaning of ethical terms and the sentences in which they figure. This course will introduce students this area of philosophy, which is an interesting arena for the interaction of moral theory,

metaphysics, ontology, moral psychology, and the philosophy of language. We consider a wide range of metaethical theories which may include non-naturalism, emotivism, error-theory, naturalism, expressivism, and fictionalism. Through this, students will gain an overview of twentieth century meta-ethics and exposure to some recent developments. In addition to students interested in ethical theory, this course will be relevant to those interested in metaphysics, epistemology, and the theory of meaning.

### Metaphysics

**Course Organiser: Nick Treanor**

**Lectures: Thursday 11:10-12:00 Tutorials: Wednesday (Group 1) 12:10-13:00 (Group 2) 13:10-14:00**

This course will introduce and examine a number of central issues in contemporary metaphysics.

Metaphysics is the study of the most basic and general features of reality. This course will focus on a range of traditional and contemporary problems in metaphysics. Specific topics to be discussed may include: universals and particulars; objects, properties and events; composition and constitution; the nature of necessity and possibility; fundamentality; ontological dependence; realism and anti-realism about truth; conceptual relativity; and the question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?'

### Metaphysics of Mind

**Course Organiser: Jesper Kallestrup**

**Seminars: Thursday 16:10-18.00**

This course focuses on the two mind-body problems. The first concerns mental causation. We tend to behave in such a way that our desires are fulfilled if our beliefs are true. But how can mental states cause our body to move? The second part concerns consciousness. If our best physical sciences are right, then our world is entirely composed of physical objects and properties. But how do we place consciousness in such a world?

### The Nature of Moral Understanding

**Course Organiser: David Levy**

**Seminars: Tuesday 11:10-13:00**

The central question we will address is: what is the nature of the understanding someone has when he or she engages with moral challenges? These challenges arise in relatively ordinary situations of the kinds presented in life, literature and film. These situations include decisions about what to do, wondering how to live, questions of whether one is under a moral obligation, contemplation of shame or guilt. We will consider, for example, what makes something a moral matter, whether I have a duty to myself, whether others can oblige me and whether morality is principally about what to do. The course is in three sections. First we will compare the predominant approach to morality with an alternative. Second we will consider specific moral phenomena like forgiveness, individuality and remorse. Third we will consider the interpersonal dimension of morality as seen in argument, persuasion and absurdity.

### The Philosophy of Fiction

**Course Organiser: Aidan McGlynn**

**Seminars: Wednesday 11:10-13:00**

This course will introduce and examine a number of philosophical issues raised by fiction, covering topics at the intersection of aesthetics and epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophies of language and mind: the nature of fiction; whether fictional characters exist and if so, what they are; whether we can gain real-world knowledge from engaging with fiction; the problem of "imaginative resistance" (why we cannot 'suspend disbelief' on things like principles of morality when engaging with fiction); and the "paradox of fiction" (how can we, for example, fear Darth Vader when we don't believe he really exists), and whether we need a new psychological state (an 'alief' in Gendler's terminology) to solve it.

### The Philosophy of David Hume

**Course Organiser: Theodore Scaltsas**

**Lectures: Monday 11:10-12:00 Tutorials: Tuesday (Group 1) 14:10-15:00 (Group 2) 15:10-16:00**

The course introduces the thought of Edinburgh's most famous philosopher, David Hume. It focuses on Hume's general philosophy (his moral philosophy being covered in Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment). The primary reading for the course will be Hume's Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding; we will also make some use of the first book of his Treatise of Human Nature and of the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.

## [Philosophy of Science Honours](#)

**Course Organiser: Michela Massimi**

**Seminars: Thursday 14:10-16:00**

The aim of this course is to provide a more advanced introduction to Philosophy of Science for Honours students, with an interest in the subject area. The course is a continuation of the pre-Hon. Philosophy of Science 1, although the latter is not a pre-requisite for it. Students will be exposed to a wide-range of topics suitable for 3rd and 4th year students: from the logic of confirmation, to underdetermination of theory by evidence, from models and simulations in science, to scientific representation, among others.

## [The Philosophy of Wittgenstein](#)

**Course Organiser: David Levy**

**Seminars: Tuesday 14:10-16:00**

This course will study Wittgenstein's early and later philosophy, concentrating on the *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* and *Philosophical Investigations*. We will learn to read Wittgenstein's own work, especially the *Tractatus* and the later sections on rule-following and private language. The course will highlight the differences between his earlier view of language and his later view based on language-games, while also noting the considerable points of continuity in Wittgenstein's philosophy. This course is oriented around a single philosopher and his work, but attention will also be given to the connections between Wittgenstein's philosophy and enduring problems in philosophy as seen in the work of Plato, Descartes and Kant.

## [Political Philosophy](#)

**Course Organiser: Guy Fletcher**

**Seminars: Tuesday 09:00-10:50**

The course will be divided into two related parts, each concerned in some way with contemporary liberalism. The first part will examine Rawls' *Justice as Fairness* and his conception of political liberalism. The second part will address the question of what restrictions on individual liberty modern states are justified in imposing.

## [Puzzles and Paradoxes](#)

**Course Organiser: Brian Rabern**

**Seminars: Friday 13:10-15:00**

Paradoxes have formed a central topic of philosophical investigation, stretching back from Zeno of Elea up to David Lewis. Paradoxes figure both in influential arguments for philosophical theses and in famous (alleged) refutations of philosophical theses. Bertrand Russell advised that one should "stock the mind with as many puzzles as possible, since these serve much the same purpose [in philosophy] as is served by experiments in physical science". This course provides an overview of a number of famous philosophical puzzles and paradoxes and important attempts to solve them. In so doing students will be introduced to some important issues in philosophy of language, philosophical logic, decision theory, and formal epistemology. The course will put emphasis on both methodology and philosophical content: (i) method: emphasis will be put on the deployment of logical and formal methods in the service of philosophical problems, (ii) content: the main philosophical themes will center around the nature of reference, truth, rational belief, and knowledge. The puzzles and paradoxes to be discussed include Russell's paradox, the liar paradox, the sorites paradox, Cartwright's paradox, Bhartrhari's paradox, Frege's puzzle, the puzzle of empty names, the surprise exam paradox, the paradox of knowability, the preface paradox, the St. Petersburg paradox, among others. With critical engagement as a primary goal the course sessions will be discussion oriented and include various peer-teaching activities.

## [Spinoza and Leibniz](#)

**Course Organiser: Pauline Phemister**

**Seminars: Thursday 10:00-12:00**

The course will introduce students to the philosophical systems of the gigantic figures in the history of philosophy, Spinoza and Leibniz. It will explore how, while responding critically to but still working within the framework of Cartesian dualism, Spinoza and Leibniz respectively transformed the Cartesian philosophy in two radically different directions, resulting in (i) Spinoza's absolute monism and, in critical response also to Spinoza, (ii) the dynamic, pluralist philosophical system of Leibniz.

## **Themes in Epistemology**

**Course Organiser: Martin Smith**

**Seminars: Tuesday 11:10-13:00**

This course introduces students to a number of major ideas and themes in contemporary epistemology. We will examine debates about the nature of knowledge and of justified belief, and cover topics including scepticism, contextualism, pragmatic encroachment, knowledge-first epistemology, reliabilism and a little formal epistemology.

## **Theory of Virtue**

**Course Organiser: Theodore Scaltsas**

**Lectures: Wednesday 11:10-12:00 Tutorials: Thursday (Group 1) 14:10-15:00 (Group 2) 15:10-16:00**

The course will introduce students to central ideas in the theory of virtue from the ancient, early modern and contemporary periods, illustrating the development of this area of moral philosophy, the various ways in which the concept of virtue has been interpreted, and the different views which have been held about its significance for ethics.