

# COURSES (2024-2025)

## Metaphysics and Epistemology

The course covers a range of topics in recent and contemporary metaphysics and epistemology. These may include some of the following: universals; causation; freedom and determinism; personal identity; possible worlds; truth; scepticism; definitions of knowledge; justification of beliefs; induction; a priori knowledge.

## Philosophy of Science

This course will offer an overview of recent and current themes in the Philosophy of Science. Topics that will be typically studied are: induction and theories of confirmation (including Bayesianism and explanationism); theories of scientific explanation and causation; the status of laws of nature; naturalism, models and the problem of representation in science; scientific realism and anti-realism; values and science.

## Modern Philosophy

The course covers European philosophy in the 17th and 18th century. It discusses both rationalists (mainly Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz) and empiricists (mainly Locke, Berkeley and Hume) and ends with Kant. It deals with topics in epistemology and metaphysics, but also ethics and political philosophy.

## Fundamentals of Analytic Philosophy

This course presents the history of analytic philosophy from its beginnings until the mid 20th century. It covers the following philosophers: Frege, Russell, Moore, the early Wittgenstein, logical positivists, the late Wittgenstein, and Quine. It mainly explores their contribution to issues about language, knowledge and science.

## Philosophy of Technology

The course examines a series of critical approaches to two interlinked ideas; the idea of the inherent neutrality of technological artifacts, and the idea of technological determinism, that is, the idea of the inevitable development of technology in virtue of an inner logic. We discuss how technological configurations can be understood not only in terms of their internal properties, but as embedded in nexuses of power relations, and, thus, as socially constituted; how the perception and understanding of the world is constitutively mediated by technological artifacts; how specific

technological configurations fashion different kinds of selfhood, and how the very distinction between the human and the technical can collapse.

### **Philosophy of Biology and the Life Sciences**

The aim of the course is to systematically study the central problems of the philosophy of biology. Three kinds of topics will be studied: First, conceptual and philosophical issues that arise within the life sciences: What is natural selection and what exactly is selected (genes, organisms, or groups of organisms)? What does it mean for a characteristic of an organism to constitute an adaptation? What exactly does it mean that something has a function, and how 'teleological' is this way of thinking? What are biological species? What is a gene? Is biology a radically different science from chemistry and physics? Second, more general issues in the philosophy of science, applied to the life sciences (biological explanation, reductionism, genetic causation). Third, philosophical questions that arise from the application of the evolutionary way of thinking to traditional philosophical problems: Can aspects of human behavior (e.g. altruism) be explained biologically? Can evolutionary thinking be applied to explain human nature, the human mind, morality?

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology explores in detail the ways in which things manifest themselves to us. The course will provide a systematic introduction to the major figures of the phenomenological movement, including Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty, as well as to contemporary developments in the phenomenological research. We shall consider issues about of perception, memory, emotion and imagination, essence and existence, substance and properties, time and its experience, the interpersonal and the bodily dimension of knowledge, the structure of human action, the possibility and limits of knowing and owning oneself.

### **Hermeneutics**

Analytical philosophy of science has – with very few exceptions – systematically avoided the treatment of the concrete problems that emerge when dealing with meaningful material, so that literally no attention is paid to a great range of disciplines that deal with text interpretation. All those disciplines, summarized under the collective term “Humanities,” are practically excluded from the endeavours of philosophers of science, largely because there is a hesitance to reconstruct and normatively appraise their activities employing the standard tools of the analytic philosophy of science, most importantly the analysis of the relationship between theory and evidence. Rather than providing a criticism of the great array of «postmodernist» approaches, the aim of this course is positive: it attempts to show that the problem of text interpretation can be dealt with in a way that respects the standards prevailing in the

general philosophy of science. Hermeneutics as the methodology of interpretation is concerned with problems that arise when dealing with meaningful human actions and the products of such actions, most importantly texts. As a methodological discipline, it offers a toolbox for efficiently treating problems of the interpretation of human actions, texts and other meaningful material. Hermeneutics looks back at a long tradition as the set of problems it addresses have been prevalent in human life, and have repeatedly and consistently called for consideration: interpretation is a ubiquitous activity, unfolding whenever humans aspire to grasp whatever interpretanda they deem significant. Due to its long history, it is only natural that both its problems, and the tools designed to help solve them, have shifted considerably over time, along with the discipline of hermeneutics itself. The course focuses on the main problem areas and presents some proposals that have been put forward for tackling them effectively.

### **Ethics**

Is there a genuine difference between good and bad situations? May we ever be correct in judging something as praiseworthy or horrible? What counts for the distinction between right and wrong responses to an unjust provocation? The course explores the reasoning that governs ordinary understanding of the fundamental concepts of ethics, through an exploration of contemporary theories about the ontological, epistemological, and practical aspects of moral experience; it will also analyze the complex relation between emotion, reason, and will, and the ways in which they shape our outlook on reality and on our self, as well as our evaluative stance towards each other. The course provides a systematic study of semantic, epistemological and metaphysical issues regarding the possibility of cognition and the nature of values.

### **Philosophy of Physics**

Brief historical development of concepts in quantum mechanics: The subversion of the mechanistic paradigm. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. Bohr's principle of complementarity. The logical structure of modern quantum mechanics. Conceptual and philosophical dimension of quantum probability. Holistic expressions and quantum computing. The composition of objects in modern physics. Humean metaphysics, emergence, and modern physics. The problem of truth in quantum mechanics.

### **Philosophy and Social Theory**

The aim of the course is to provide answers to the following questions: What do we mean when we say that we can explain a social phenomenon? Which explanations are good? Are social structures best understood as systems of laws and forces or as networks of meanings and practices? Does social action constitute rational behavior or is it a form of self-expression? Should the social

sciences attempt to explain social events along the lines of the natural sciences or to understand them from within with particular methods? Are there social laws?

### **MA Dissertation**

In writing their MA thesis, students become acquainted with the literature on its topic, which will be a relatively narrow research issue in contemporary philosophy or in philosophy of science, they critically assess the views and arguments that can be found in the literature and produce what is in effect an extended philosophical essay on that topic.