COURSES (2025-2026)

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 from the 17th to the early 19th century. It discusses both rationalists (mainly Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz) and empiricists (mainly Locke, Berkeley and Hume) and concludes with Kant and Hegel. It deals mainly with topics in epistemology and metaphysics, but also in ethics and aesthetics.

[Strand A: Contemporary Philosophy]

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.

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. 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 interpret and 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.

Philosophy of Mind and Language

So much happens in our minds! We perceive our environment, we think about things, we have emotions, we have dreams, hopes, beliefs… But what are all of these? How do they come about, and what makes them the way that they are? The success of brain science and cognitive science suggest that they are strongly connected to brain states and processes, but what exactly is this connection? Are the mental states and processes merely brain states or processes? Or perhaps some sort of computation that runs on the brain as its hardware, as the advancement of computers, and especially artificial intelligence, may suggest? Or does the mind involve something over and above the material brain, something that makes us who we are and could, for example, remain once the body is no longer alive? If so, what might that be? And how should we go about searching for it? Do non-human animals have minds, and if so, to what extent is it similar to the human mind and in what way do they differ? Can inanimate things like computers think? The success of AI systems of Large Language Models raises further questions about the nature of thought and language: How is it that certain noises or marks that people or computers make can be about something else? How does language "hook onto" the world? What is the nature of meaning? How is thought connected to reality? Philosophical tradition and contemporary philosophy and science offer a variety of answers to these questions. The course will introduce students to these ideas, focusing on prominent conceptual tools and theories in contemporary analytic philosophy and in view of the achievements of contemporary science.

[Strand B: Philosophy of Science]

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?

Philosophy and Social Theory

The aim of the course is to answer the following questions: What do we mean when we say that we can explain a social phenomenon? Which explanations are good? Are social structures better understood as systems of laws and forces or as networks of meanings and practices? Is social action a kind of rational behavior or a form of self-expression? Should the social sciences attempt to explain social events according to the model of the natural sciences, or should they understand them from within, using specific methods? Are there social laws?

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.

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.