

Tutorials: Philosophy

THE STUDY OF ANCIENT AND MODERN PHILOSOPHY is well established at Oxford. The faculty is the largest in the country and is home to over 150 professional philosophers as well as a specialist library. In addition there are several specialist research centres which explore such themes as practical ethics for the future of humanity.

With the exception of a handful of courses, the descriptions below are copyright University of Oxford and cover tutorial courses offered by the University to matriculated undergraduates. SSO students follow such courses as closely as is practicable, though there may be scope for minor variation to take into account students' previous experience. Students will not necessarily cover all the material cited in the description (especially when they take the course as a secondary tutorial). All tutorials involve in-depth study: where the title might suggest a survey course, the content of the tutorial will involve focused study on part of the syllabus.

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Aesthetics

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to study a number of questions about the nature and value of beauty and of the arts. For example, do we enjoy sights and sounds because they are beautiful, or are they beautiful because we enjoy them? Does the enjoyment of beauty involve a particular sort of experience, and if so, how should we define it and what psychological

capacities does it presuppose? Is a work of art a physical object, an abstract object, or what? Does the value of a work of art depend only upon its long- or short-term effects on our minds or characters? If not, what sorts of reasons can we give for admiring a work of art? Do reasons for admiring paintings, pieces of music and poems have enough in common with one another, and little enough in common with reasons for

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admiring other kinds of things, to support the idea that there is a distinctive sort of value which good art of every sort, and only art, possesses? As well as general questions such as these ones, the subject also addresses questions raised by particular art forms. For example, what is the difference between a picture and a description in words? Can fiction embody truths about its subject-matter? How does music express emotions? All of these questions, and others, are addressed directly, and also by examining classic texts, including Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Poetics, Hume's Essay on the Standard of Taste and Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement.

Introductory reading: Malcolm Budd, *Values of Art* (Penguin)

Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics

The purpose of this subject is to give you the opportunity to make a critical study of one of the most important works in the history of philosophy. Like Plato in the Republic, Aristotle is concerned with the question, what is the best possible sort of life? Whereas this leads Plato to pose grand questions in metaphysics and political theory, it leads Aristotle to offer close analyses of the structure of human action, responsibility, the virtues, the nature of moral knowledge, weakness of will, pleasure, friendship, and other related issues. Much of what Aristotle has to say on these is ground-breaking, highly perceptive, and still of importance in contemporary debate in ethics and moral psychology. You are expected to study the work in detail.

Introductory reading: J. L. Ackrill, *Aristotle the Philosopher*, ch. 10; set translation: Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. with notes by T.H. Irwin (Hackett).

Augustine, Early Christianity, and Late Antique Philosophy

The period from Philo of Alexandria in the first century to Boethius in the sixth was critical to both the development of philosophy in its own right and the Christian intellectual tradition. One of the most important and influential of these thinkers was Augustine but he did not stand

alone. Giving particular attention to Augustine, this tutorial will look at a variety of philosophers and ideas (including Jewish and pagan) in their contexts, including Philo, Origen, Plotinus, Augustine, and Boethius.

Introductory reading: John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient thought baptized* (Cambridge, 1994); Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1994)

Ethics

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to come to grips with some questions which exercise many people, philosophers and non-philosophers alike. How should we decide what is best to do, and how best to lead our lives? Are our value judgments on these and other matters objective or do they merely reflect our subjective preferences and viewpoints? Are we in fact free to make these choices, or have our decisions already been determined by antecedent features of our environment and genetic endowment? In considering these issues you will examine a variety of ethical concepts, such as those of justice, rights, equality, virtue, and happiness, which are widely used in moral and political argument. There is also opportunity to discuss some applied ethical issues. Knowledge of major historical thinkers, e.g. Aristotle and Hume and Kant, will be encouraged.

Introductory reading: John Mackie, *Ethics* (Penguin), chs. 1–2.

Formal Logic

Formal logic is an extremely demanding and rigorous subject, even for those who have a background in mathematics. If you lose your way in it, there is liable to be no way of avoiding disaster. But granted these caveats, the subject is a delight to those who enjoy formal work and who are good at it. Its purpose is to introduce you to some of the deepest and most beautiful results in logic, many of which have fascinating implications for other areas of philosophy. There are three sections. The first covers Propositional and Predicate Logic. The other two sections are: Set Theory, which includes the rudimentary

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arithmetic of infinite numbers; and Metamathematics, which includes some computability theory and various results concerning the limitations of formalization, such as Gödel's theorem.

Introductory reading: George S. Boolos and Richard C. Jeffrey, *Computability and Logic* (Cambridge, 3rd edn.)

Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to study some classic texts from which emerged modern logic and philosophy of language. Frege invented and explained the logic of multiple generality (quantification theory) and applied this apparatus to the analysis of arithmetic. Russell continued this programme, adding some refinements (the theory of types, the theory of descriptions), and he applied logic to many traditional problems in epistemology. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* outlined an ambitious project for giving a logical account of truths of logic (as tautologies). The texts are dense and sophisticated, but they are elegant and full of challenging ideas. Ability to understand logical symbolism is important, and previous work in philosophical logic would be advantageous.

Introductory reading: Anthony Kenny, *Frege* (Penguin) and Wittgenstein (Penguin); J. O. Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis*.

History of Philosophy from Descartes to Kant

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to gain a critical understanding of some of the metaphysical and epistemological ideas of some of the most important philosophers of the early modern period, between the 1630s to the 1780s. This period saw a great flowering of philosophy in Europe. Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, often

collectively referred to as 'the rationalists', placed the new 'corpuscularian' science within grand metaphysical systems which certified our God-given capacity to reason our way to the laws of nature (as well as to many other, often astonishing conclusions about the world). Locke wrote in a different, empiricist tradition. He argued that, since our concepts all ultimately derive from experience, our knowledge is necessarily limited. Berkeley and Hume developed this empiricism in the direction of a kind of idealism, according to which the world studied by science is in some sense mind-dependent and mind-constructed.

Kant subsequently sought to arbitrate between the rationalists and the empiricists, by rooting out some assumptions common to them and trying thereby to salvage and to reconcile some of their apparently irreconcilable insights. Reading the primary texts is of great importance.

Introductory reading: R.S. Woolhouse, *The Empiricists*; J. Cottingham, *The Rationalists* (both Oxford University Press Opus series).



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Intermediate Philosophy of Physics

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to come to grips with conceptual problems in special relativity and quantum mechanics. Only those with a substantial knowledge of physics should choose this subject.

Introduction to Logic

Logic is the study of patterns of valid inference and involves some study of a formal system. Students are required to do exercises and proofs in a formal system, and also to understand the relation between the elements of the formal system and the kinds of inference and argument used in ordinary language. You are likely to find it useful in further philosophical study to have some familiarity with a formal logical language and the ability to use it to investigate logical relationships and to understand its use by others. The course is based on a manual by Dr Volker Halbach of New College, which will be made available to students via the Philosophy Faculty website.

Introductory reading: Mark Sainsbury, *Logical Forms* (Wiley-Blackwell), Chapters, 1, 2, and 4

Knowledge and Reality

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to examine some central questions about the nature of the world and the extent to which we can have knowledge of it. In considering knowledge you will examine whether it is possible to attain knowledge of what the world is really like. Is our knowledge of the world necessarily limited to what we can observe to be the case? Indeed, are even our observational beliefs about the world around us justified? Can we have knowledge of what will happen based on what has happened? Is our understanding of the world necessarily limited to what we can prove to be the case? Or can we understand claims about the remote past or distant future which we cannot in principle prove to be true?

In considering reality you will focus on questions such as the following. Does the world really contain the three-dimensional objects and their properties — such as red buses or black horses — which we appear to encounter in everyday life?

Or is it made up rather of the somewhat different entities studied by science, such as colourless atoms or four-dimensional space-time worms? What is the relation between the common sense picture of the world and that provided by contemporary science? Is it correct to think of the objects and their properties that make up the world as being what they are independently of our preferred ways of dividing up reality? These issues are discussed with reference to a variety of specific questions such as 'What is time?', 'What is the nature of causation?', and 'What are substances?' There is also an opportunity in this subject to study such topics as reference, truth and definition.

Introductory reading: Jonathan Dancy, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Oxford), chs. 1–3; Michael J. Loux, *Metaphysics* (Routledge)

Medieval Philosophy: Aquinas

The purpose of this subject is to introduce you to many of Aquinas's central ideas and arguments on a wide variety of theological and philosophical topics. These include the proofs of the existence of God (the famous 'five ways'), the concept of the simplicity of God (including the controversial issue of the identity of being and essence in God), the concept of the soul in general and of the human soul in particular, the proof of the immortality of the human soul, the nature of perception and of intellectual knowledge, the notion of free will and of happiness, the theory of human actions. These are studied in translation rather than in the Latin original, though a glance at Aquinas's remarkably readable Latin can often be useful. Candidates are encouraged to carefully read and analyze Aquinas's texts and to focus on the philosophical questions they raise. Although not essential, previous study of Aristotle's *Physics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* provide a useful background for this option.

Introductory reading: *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 2–11, 75–89; Ia IIae, 1–21; Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas*; F.C. Copleston, *Aquinas*; B. Davies, *The*

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Thought of Thomas Aquinas (Oxford University Press)

Medieval Philosophy: Duns Scotus and Ockham

Duns Scotus and Ockham are, together with Aquinas, the most significant and influential thinkers of the Middle Ages. The purpose of this subject is to make you familiar with some fundamental aspects of their theological and philosophical thought. As to Scotus, these include the proof of the existence and of the unicity of God (the most sophisticated one in the Middle Ages) and the issues about causality that it raises, the theory of the existence of concepts common to God and creatures (the univocity theory of religious language), the discussion about the immateriality and the immortality of the human soul, and the reply to scepticism. As to Ockham, they include nominalism about universals and the refutation of realism (including the realism of Duns Scotus), some issues in logic and especially the theory of 'suppositio' and its application in the debate about universals, the theory of intellectual knowledge of singulars and the question of whether we can have evidence about contingent properties of singulars, the nature of efficient causality and the problem of whether we can prove the existence of a first efficient cause. These are studied in translation rather than in the Latin original, though a glance at the Latin can often be useful. Candidates are encouraged to carefully read and analyze Scotus's and Ockham's texts and to focus on the philosophical questions they raise.

Introductory reading: Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings* (transl. A. Wolter); Ockham, *Philosophical Writings* (transl. P. Boehner); R. Cross, *Duns Scotus*; M. McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, vol. 1.

Philosophical Theology

Students will study the philosophical assumptions and implications of Christian doctrines, including the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the Atonement, and may also explore the nature of the qualities traditionally attributed to God (for example, omnipotence, omniscience,

eternity, and necessity). Other topics covered may include the question of whether faith can be rational, whether we can talk meaningfully about God, the nature of revelation, the power of prayer, whether belief in miracles can be justified, the relationship between religion and morality, and the possibility of life after death. Students may address questions such as: Does it make sense to say that the life and death of Jesus atoned for the sins of the world? How can one know that a purportedly divine revelation is indeed genuine? In what sense is God both three and one? Is God's knowledge of the future compatible with human free will? Can we change God's mind by petitioning God through prayer?

Introductory reading: Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God* (Intervarsity Press/ Regent College Publishing); Michael Peterson and other authors, *Reason and Religious Belief* (Oxford University Press)

Philosophy of Mathematics

What is the relation of mathematical knowledge to other kinds of knowledge? Is it of a special kind, concerning objects of a special kind? If so, what is the nature of those objects and how do we come to know anything about them? If not, how do we explain the seeming difference between proving a theorem in mathematics and establishing something about the physical world? The purpose of this subject is to enable you to examine questions such as these. Understanding the nature of mathematics has been important to many philosophers, including Plato, Aristotle, and Kant, as a test or as an exemplar of their overall position, and has also played a role in the development of mathematics at certain points. While no specific knowledge of mathematics is required for study of this subject, it will be helpful to have studied mathematics at a reasonably advanced level, and to have some prior knowledge of philosophical logic.

Introductory reading: Stephen F. Barker, *Philosophy of Mathematics* (Prentice-Hall).

Philosophy of Mind

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to examine a variety of questions about the nature

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of persons and their psychological states, including such general questions as: what is the relation between persons and their minds? Could robots or automata be persons? What is the relation between our minds and our brains? If we understood everything about the brain, would we understand everything about consciousness and rational thought? If not, why not? Several of these issues focus on the relation between our common sense understanding of ourselves and others, and the view of the mind developed in scientific psychology and neuroscience. Are the two accounts compatible? Should one be regarded as better than the other? Should our common sense understanding of the mind be jettisoned in favour of the scientific picture? Or does the latter leave out something essential to a proper understanding of ourselves and others? Other more specific questions concern memory, thought, belief, emotion, perception, and action.

Introductory reading: Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness* (Cambridge) chs. 1–3.

Philosophy of Religion

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to examine claims about the existence of God and God's relationship to the world. What, if anything, is meant by them? Could they be true? What justification, if any, can or needs to be provided for them? The paper is concerned primarily with the claims of Western religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), and with the central claim of those religions, that there is a God. God is said to be omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, a source of moral obligation and so on. But what does it mean to say that God has these properties, and are they consistent with each other? Could God change the past, or choose to do evil? Does it make sense to say that God is outside time? You will have the opportunity to study arguments for the existence of God: for example, the teleological argument from the fact that the universe is governed by scientific laws, and the argument from people's religious experiences. Other issues are whether the fact of pain and suffering counts strongly, or even conclusively, against the existence of God, whether there could be evidence for miracles,

whether it could be shown that prayer 'works', whether there could be life after death, and what philosophical problems are raised by the existence of different religions. There may also be the opportunity to study specifically Christian doctrines – for example, does it make sense to say that the life and death of Jesus atoned for the sins of the world, and could one know this? There is abundant scope for deploying all the knowledge and techniques which you have acquired in other areas of philosophy. Among the major philosophers whose contributions to the philosophy of religion you will need to study are Aquinas, Hume, and Kant.

Introductory reading: M. Peterson and other authors, *Reason and Religious Belief, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford University Press)

Philosophy of Science

Philosophy of science is applied epistemology and applied metaphysics. It is theory of scientific knowledge and scientific method, including elements in philosophy of language, philosophy of mathematics, and metaphysics. It deals with metaphysical questions – about space, time, causation, ontology, necessity, truth – as they arise across the board in the special sciences, not just in physics. Questions of method include questions of the theory-observation distinction, testability, induction, theory confirmation, and scientific explanation. They also include theory-change, whether inter-theoretic reduction, unification, or revolutionary change. They are at once questions about scientific rationality, and connect in turn with decision theory and the foundations of probability. They connect also with metaphysics, particularly realism: theory-change, scepticism, fictionalism, naturalism, the under-determination of theory by data, functionalism, structuralism, are all critiques of realism. The subject also includes the study of major historical schools in philosophy of science. The most important of these is logical positivism (later logical empiricism), that dominated the second and third quarters of the last century. In fact, some of the most important current schools in philosophy of science are broadly continuous

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with it, notably constructive empiricism and structural realism.

Introductory reading: Don Gillies, *Philosophy of Science in the Twentieth Century* (Blackwells); James Ladyman, *Understanding Philosophy of Science* (Routledge)

Philosophy of Science and Philosophy of Psychology and Neuroscience

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to study topics in the philosophy of science in general, and topics in the philosophy of psychology and neuroscience in particular. In the broadest sense the philosophy of science is concerned with the theory of knowledge and with associated questions in metaphysics. What is distinctive about the field is the focus on 'scientific' knowledge, and metaphysical questions — concerning space, time, causation, probability, possibility, necessity, realism and idealism — that follow in their train. As such it is concerned with distinctive traits of science: testability, objectivity, scientific explanation, and the nature of scientific theories.

The philosophy of psychology and neuroscience addresses questions that arise from the scientific study of the mind. (The philosophy of mind, in contrast, starts from our ordinary everyday thinking about mental matters.) Some of the questions addressed are extremely general and are closely connected with topics, such as explanation and reduction, that you will cover in the philosophy of science part of the course. Other questions relate to key notions that are used in cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience, such as representation, computation, tacit knowledge, implicit rules, and modularity. There are also questions that focus on specific aspects of contemporary research into topics such as consciousness, perception, memory, reasoning and the way that cognitive abilities break down after brain damage. It is not necessary for you to be studying neuroscience or experimental psychology; nor do you need expertise in statistics. What is important is that you should enjoy reading about psychology and neuroscience and that you should be interested in the relationship between scientific and

philosophical ways of approaching questions about the mind.

Introductory reading: Don Gillies, *Philosophy of Science in the Twentieth Century* (Blackwells); Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness* (Cambridge) chs. 1–3.

Philosophy of Science and Social Science

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to study topics in the philosophy of science in general, and topics in the philosophy of social science in particular.

In the broadest sense the philosophy of science is concerned with the theory of knowledge and with associated questions in metaphysics. What is distinctive about the field is the focus on 'scientific' knowledge, and metaphysical questions — concerning space, time, causation, probability, possibility, necessity, realism and idealism — that follow in their train. As such it is concerned with distinctive traits of science: testability, objectivity, scientific explanation, and the nature of scientific theories. Whether economics, sociology, and political science are 'really' sciences is a question that lay people as well as philosophers have often asked. The technology spawned by the physical sciences is more impressive than that based on the social sciences: bridges do not collapse and aeroplanes do not fall from the sky, but no government can reliably control crime, divorce, or unemployment, or make its citizens happy at will. Human behaviour often seems less predictable, and less explicable than that of inanimate nature and non-human animals, even though most of us believe that we know what we are doing and why. So philosophers of social science have asked whether human action is to be explained causally or non-causally, whether predictions are self-refuting, whether we can only explain behaviour that is in some sense rational - and if so, what that sense is. Other central issues include social relativism, the role of ideology, value-neutrality, and the relationship between the particular social sciences, in particular whether economics provides a model for other social science. Finally, some critics have asked whether a technological view of 'social control' does not

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presented through debates, through analogies and images, including the famous simile of the Cave, as well as rigorous argument, and you will encounter some of Plato's important contributions to ethics, political theory, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and aesthetics. You are expected to study the work in detail.

Introductory reading: Julia Annas, An

threaten democratic politics as usually understood.

Introductory reading: Martin Hollis, *The Philosophy of Social Science* (Cambridge); Alexander Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science* (Westview).

Plato, Republic

Plato's influence on the history of philosophy is enormous. The purpose of this subject is to enable you to make a critical study of *The Republic*, which is perhaps his most important and most influential work. Written as a dialogue between Socrates and others including the outspoken immoralist Thrasymachus, it is primarily concerned with questions of the nature of justice and of what is the best kind of life to lead. These questions prompt discussions of the ideal city - which Karl Popper criticised as totalitarian - of education and art, of the nature of knowledge, the Theory of Forms and the immortality of the soul. In studying it you will encounter a work of philosophy of unusual literary merit, one in which philosophy is

Introduction to Plato's *Republic*, Introduction and ch. 1; set translation: Plato: *Republic*, trans. Grube, revised Reeve (Hackett).

Post-Kantian Philosophy

Many of the questions raised by German and French philosophers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were thought to arise directly out of Kant's metaphysics, epistemology and ethics: hence the title of this subject, the purpose of which is to enable you to explore some of the developments of (and departures from) Kantian themes in the work of Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty. Students typically focus their study on only two chosen authors.

Hegel and Schopenhauer delineate global, metaphysical systems out of which each develops his own distinctive vision of ethical and (especially in the case of Hegel) political life. Nietzsche's writings less obviously constitute a 'system', but they too develop certain ethical and existential implications of our epistemological and metaphysical commitments. Husserl will interest those pupils attracted to problems in

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ontology and epistemology such as feature in the Cartesian tradition; his work also serves to introduce one to phenomenology, the philosophical method later developed and refined by Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty.

In Heidegger and Sartre, that method is brought to bear on such fundamental aspects of human existence as authenticity, social understanding, bad faith, art and freedom. Merleau-Ponty (who trained as a psychologist) presents a novel and important account of the genesis of perception, cognition and feeling, and relates these to themes in aesthetics and political philosophy. While this is very much a text-based paper, many of the questions addressed are directly relevant to contemporary treatments of problems in epistemology and metaphysics, in aesthetics, political theory and the philosophy of mind.

Introductory reading: Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford University Press).

The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to study some of the most influential ideas of the twentieth century. The main texts are Wittgenstein's posthumously-published *Philosophical Investigations* and *The Blue and Brown Books*. These writings are famous not just for their content but also for their distinctive style and conception of philosophy. There is much critical discussion about the relation between those aspects of Wittgenstein's work.

Wittgenstein covers a great range of issues, principally in philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. In philosophy of language, one key topic is the nature of rules and rule-following. What is involved in grasping a rule; and how can I tell, in a new case, what I have to do to apply the rule correctly? Indeed, what makes it the case that a particular move at this stage is the correct way of applying the rule; is there any standard of correctness other than the agreement of our fellows? Other topics include: whether language is systematic; the relation between linguistic meaning and non-linguistic

activities; whether concepts can be illuminatingly analysed. In the philosophy of mind, Wittgenstein is especially famous for the so-called 'private language argument', which tries to show that words for sensations cannot get their meanings by being attached to purely internal, introspective, 'private objects'. Other, equally important, topics include the nature of the self, of introspection and of visual experience, and the intentionality (the representative quality) of mental states. Most generally, can we (as Wittgenstein thought) avoid Cartesianism without lapsing into behaviourism?

Introductory reading: *Philosophical Investigations*, paras 1–80; *Blue Book*, pp. 1–17; Saul Kripke: *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Blackwell); Marie McGinn: *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (Routledge, 1997, in the *Routledge Philosophy Guidebooks* series)

The Philosophy of Kant

The purpose of this paper is to enable you to make a critical study of some of the ideas of one of the greatest of all philosophers. Immanuel Kant lived from 1724 to 1804. He published the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781, and the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* in 1785. The 'Critique' is his greatest work and, without question, the most influential work of modern philosophy. It is a difficult but enormously rewarding work. This is largely because Kant, perhaps uniquely, combines in the highest measure the cautious qualities of care, rigour and tenacity with the bolder quality of philosophical imagination. Its concern is to give an account of human knowledge that will steer a path between the dogmatism of traditional metaphysics and the scepticism that, Kant believes, is the inevitable result of the empiricist criticism of metaphysics. Kant's approach, he claims in a famous metaphor, amounts to a "Copernican revolution" in philosophy. Instead of looking at human knowledge by starting from what is known, we should start from ourselves as knowing subjects and ask how the world must be for us to have the kind of knowledge and experience that we have. Kant thinks that his

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Copernican revolution also enables him to reconcile traditional Christian morality and modern science, in the face of their apparently irreconcilable demands (in the one case, that we should be free agents, and in the other case, that the world should be governed by inexorable mechanical laws). In the 'Groundwork' Kant develops his very distinctive and highly influential moral philosophy. He argues that morality is grounded in reason. What we ought to do is what we would do if we acted in a way that was purely rational. To act in a way that is purely rational is to act in accordance with the famous 'categorical imperative', which Kant expresses as follows: 'Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law'.

Introductory reading: Critique of Pure Reason , trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Macmillan); Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals , trans. H.J. Paton (Hutchinson); Roger Scruton, Kant.

The Philosophy of Logic and Language

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to examine some fundamental questions relating to reasoning and language. The philosophy of logic is not itself a symbolic or mathematical subject, but examines concepts of interest to the logician. If you want to know the answer to the question 'What is truth?', this is a subject for you. Central also are questions about the status of basic logical laws and the nature of logical necessity. What, if anything, makes it true that nothing can be at the same time both green and not green all over? Is that necessity the result of our conventions or stipulations, or the reflection of how things have to be independently of us? Philosophy of language is closely related. It covers the very general question how language can describe reality at all: what makes our sentences meaningful and, on occasion, true? How do parts of our language refer to objects in the world? What is involved in understanding speech (or the written word)? You may also investigate more specific issues concerning the correct analysis of particular linguistic expressions such as names, descriptions, pronouns, or adverbs, and aspects of linguistics and grammatical theory.

Introductory reading: Mark Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', in Philosophy, a Guide through the Subject, edited by A. C. Grayling (Oxford).

Theory of Politics

In order to understand the world of politics, we also need to know which views of politics and society people have when they make political decisions, and why we recommend certain courses of action rather than others. This purpose of this subject is to enable you to look at the main ideas we use when we think about politics: why do we have competing views of social justice and what makes a particular view persuasive, possibly even right? What happens when a concept such as freedom has different meanings, so that those who argue that we must maximise freedom of choice are confronted with those who claim that some choices will actually restrict your freedom? Is power desirable or harmful? Would feminists or nationalists give a different answer to that question? Political theory is concerned with developing good responses to problems such as: when should we obey, and when should we disobey, the state? But it is also concerned with mapping the ways in which we approach questions such as: how does one argue in favour of human rights? In addition, you will explore the main ideologies, such as liberalism, conservatism, and socialism, in order to understand their main arguments and why each of them will direct us to different political solutions and arrangements.

Introductory reading: Will Kymlicka, Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction (Oxford University Press)