

Welcome to York

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

FIRST-YEAR

UNDERGRADUATE HANDBOOK

2024/25

Read Me!

Welcome to the Department of Philosophy—we're very pleased that you are joining us, and we look forward to meeting you. We hope you enjoy your time at York and that you find your course stimulating and rewarding.

This handbook is designed for First Year students. It explains what you need to know about beginning to study Philosophy at York. Read it carefully, keep it safe, and refer back to it. You'll need to refer to it several times during your first year (the information is available online on the Department's web-pages, together with other useful information, but it will be handy to have a copy of this). We have also prepared a wider, [generic Undergraduate Handbook](#) if you would like to read more. You can find it on the Department of Philosophy pages.

Some of you will be coming to Philosophy for the first time. For nearly all of you, studying at university will be very different from the work you have done at school or college. I can't emphasise too strongly just *how* different it is. We expect you to take responsibility for your own ideas and your own progress, to become an independent scholar and thinker, not just to absorb what we tell you and report it back to us. But that is why university study is so rewarding: you have the opportunity to really *think* and work out your ideas, and it is our job to support you in doing that. It is not easy to think carefully about difficult topics, but by the end of the three years you spend here you will have a set of skills which will not only allow you to engage with interesting philosophical debates, but are also applicable to all sorts of other work and areas of life.

To succeed you will have to be disciplined and self-motivated, manage your time effectively, think critically and carefully, and *use* what you learn to develop answers to new problems and work out your own position on philosophical issues. This is an exciting process, and the work you do in your first year will help you make the transition from school to university successfully. The rest of this booklet covers:

- Things to know and do before you arrive at York
- Your first week at University (Key dates and times for Week 0)
- Studying philosophy at York
- Your course requirements
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We'll see you soon!



Dr Chris Jay
Director of the First Year Programme

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Things to know and do before you arrive

How can you prepare for your first Semester? This section makes some suggestions to help you get into the swing.

Information

The [University Welcome](#) page has lots of information about becoming a student at York. It will guide you through the various things you need to do before you arrive, and provides a link to your timetable of welcome and orientation events.

It also tells you how to upgrade your IT account. Once you've done this, you can access pages on the University's [Virtual Learning Environment \(VLE\)](#). Here you'll find a number of modules to support your studies. Some of these will not be available until teaching begins.

The *Academic Integrity Tutorial* is compulsory for all students. You must complete it, otherwise you will not be able to progress to the next stage of your programme. This Tutorial explains the rules about plagiarism, referencing etc. which the University enforces. Again, you do not have to start it before Semester begins, but you may want to do so once it becomes available; it will not take you long to complete.

You can [find out more about the University](#) from the website, and [more about the Department of Philosophy](#). Take a look at these before you arrive at York; the departmental pages [About Us](#), and [For Current Students](#) will be most useful to you.

The Department has its own [Facebook page](#). There is also a student-run Philosophy Society.

See the [University of York Students' Union](#) webpage (or York SU for short) for Facebook pages and Twitter feeds giving information about Freshers Week events.

Communication

We will normally communicate with you via your university email account, so it is really important that you check this regularly once your course starts—at least once each weekday during Semester. Don't forget to check it regularly outside of Semester too, as otherwise you might miss important information.

People

You can find out more about the [Department's staff from our webpage](#). There are some people you will meet soon after you arrive:

Your supervisor

You will be allocated a supervisor, a member of academic staff who will be a constantly available point of contact with the Department during your time at York. You'll meet with them at the start of each Semester to review your progress and talk through any problems. The relationship with your supervisor is very important: they are your first point of contact if you have any problems, need advice or want to discuss course options. The best way to contact your supervisor quickly is by email (e-mail addresses are given on the About Us pages of the Department's website), but you can also telephone or visit them during their Feedback and Advice Time (aka Office Hour). This is a time each academic sets aside every week to see students (to give advice or guidance, answer questions, discuss problems or just talk philosophy). We'll be pleased to see you at Feedback and Advice sessions—you don't need to make an appointment. Each academic will set a regular Feedback and Advice time at the beginning of each Semester—you'll find details in the department Foyer, on our office doors and [on our website](#).

Your module leaders and tutors

Each module is led by a member of the academic staff who gives the lectures and is responsible for module administration. In the first year, they are assisted by seminar tutors who are carefully selected and trained research students. Module leaders and tutors will be happy to see you during their Feedback and Advice Times. Note that the best ways to contact academics are by email or by dropping in to a Feedback and Advice session.

Director of the First Year Programme

The first year of your course is particularly important in helping you get settled into university life and work, so there is a member of staff who oversees the first year as a whole. This is currently Dr Chris Jay, who can be contacted at christoper.jay@york.ac.uk. Chris's office is Sally Baldwin Building, Block A, Room A/111 (upstairs next to the photocopier)

The Departmental Office and Student Support Service Administrators

The Philosophy Department is based in Sally Baldwin Buildings, Block A, and most staff have offices here. Unless it is open for teaching or other events, the building is only accessible from 9.00am–5.00pm.

The Departmental Office is on the ground floor, next to the front door. Here you will find our Student Services Team: **Jo Hawksworth** - Student Services Manager; **Karen Norris** - Student Services Coordinator; **Anna Richardson**, **Andzelika Skarupa-McShane** and **Suzy Thom** - Student Services Administrators. The Departmental Office is open for enquiries Monday to Friday, 10.00 am to 12.30 pm and 1.30 pm to 4.00 pm. *Please keep to these times.*

Here are contact details:

Department of Philosophy
University of York
Heslington
York YO10 5DD
Tel: 01904 323251
E-mail: philosophy@york.ac.uk

The Philosophy Society:

York is lucky to have a very active student-run Philosophy Society, and joining the Society is an excellent way of meeting other students and pursuing your philosophical interests outside the seminar room. They're a friendly bunch and organise social events, film shows, talks and discussions. Join their Facebook group (see above) and meet them at our welcome events and/or the Freshers' Fair.

Preparing to study

The best way of studying philosophy is by *doing* it, not by learning *about* it, and this means reading (and thinking hard about) works of philosophy. There are some very good 'Introductions...' or 'Guides...' but they are never a substitute for the real thing. As Bertrand Russell put it: 'The student who wishes to acquire an elementary knowledge of philosophy will find it both easier and more profitable to read some of the works of the great philosophers than to attempt to derive an all-round view from handbooks'. You can find some suggestions for things to read to get your philosophical brain warmed up in [Reading Suggestions Appendix](#).

Your first week at university

The first week of Semester 1 (Freshers Week) is Monday 16th September to Sunday 22th September 2024 (overseas students will arrive a little earlier). When you've upgraded your IT account and enrolled online, you will be able to see your timetable for Welcome and Orientation Events (see the [University's Welcome page](#)). You will receive information about department-specific events at the start of Semester 1. Important things to do during Freshers Week:

Meet your supervisor

You will be allocated an academic supervisor when you register, and you should attend an introductory meeting with him or her in Freshers Week. We'll be in touch with you to tell you when this will be.

Complete the online Academic Integrity tutorial

This is a University requirement and all students must complete a compulsory online integrity tutorial. Available mid-September via [Virtual Learning Environment \(VLE\)](#). Why not do it as soon as possible? It will only take an hour or so.

Find out about the Library

Even if you think you know all about libraries please visit the library [quickstart guide](#) page, and make sure you also visit the real thing! Look out for a library skills session modules on your VLE.

Check your timetable and your module requirements

Check your [online timetable](#) and read the *Your first year modules* section below.

College events

The Head of each college will hold welcome events for new students. You can still belong to college even if you live off campus. Make the most of the offered events.

Medical registration

Ensure that you register with a GP. See the University pages for details of [health centre](#) registration.

Disability Services

[University disability services](#) are here to offer advice and support to students, as well as to promote inclusivity across the University. If you have used Student Support in the past - please get in touch with the Disability team as your records will not be transferred automatically.

Collect your University card

This acts as your ID, room access, library and printing card – so it matters. Collect yours from college reception if you're living on campus, or from the Unicard desk in the Information Centre otherwise.

University of York Students' Union (York SU)

See [University Student union website](#) and their freshers' site for information on Students' Union activities, and join their official freshers' Facebook group

International students

See the University *Welcome* page for 'blue box' information [specifically for international students](#).

Studying philosophy at York

Philosophy is not a subject where you will be asked to memorise and repeat a lot of material. The main aim of the course is to equip you to think seriously and independently about major philosophical questions, to understand what is involved in these questions, and to form and defend your own answers to them.

These questions are always difficult, and you usually have to think hard about them for a while to understand them. Don't expect to pick things up on a first reading. Since philosophy involves questions which are sometimes more complex than they appear at first, and ideas which require careful reflection, you will find that a lot of your course involves private study – reading and thinking on your own. But it is also important that you learn to discuss philosophical ideas orally and in writing. You'll probably find that explaining to others what you think and trying to support it with arguments lets you see where an idea needs work, or helps you to an insight which changes your view. You'll do this formally in seminars and written work and, we hope, in informal discussions with other philosophy students.

Your course is made up of distinct units or *modules*, which each run for one semester. The first year consists of certain set modules, however many programmes allow students to choose a module in Semester 2. It can be a Philosophy module or you can decide to take a [module outside of the department](#). In your second year you choose from various modules representing different areas of philosophy. This will give you a foundation which you can build on in your third year where you will have a further choice of modules.

Seminars and tutorials

An essential part of our teaching, seminars/tutorials are regular structured meetings with other students and a tutor to discuss some specific module material. Preparation is essential to make the most of these opportunities. Seminars give you the chance to develop your skills by discussing ideas with others: presenting ideas clearly, forming and evaluating arguments, listening carefully to others and working together to develop and deepen your understanding. Often, students feel that they cannot contribute to a seminar unless they are absolutely certain that what they think is correct. This is a mistake: we can only have a productive discussion if people are willing to contribute, and someone who is prepared to put forward an idea helps everyone to clarify their own thoughts. Seminars are not about always being right, or winning an argument, but about working together to develop your skills and understanding.

Lectures

Most modules supplement seminars and tutorials with formal lectures. Lectures are not like classroom teaching; they aim to give you an introduction to the subject under discussion, and stimulate you to think harder about it by raising questions and possible lines of criticism for you to reflect on. But they will not tell you all that you need to know; instead, they introduce key ideas and arguments, and you should think of them as guiding and supporting your own reading and thinking about a subject.

All classes (lectures and seminars) are compulsory, and you must give an acceptable explanation (illness or other compassionate circumstances) for any unavoidable seminar absences. This is a basic courtesy to your seminar tutor and fellow seminar members (although your reason for absence will not be shared with other students).

Private Study

You will find that you have about three to ten hours per week of formally scheduled teaching in philosophy, depending on your particular degree programme. This may not seem like very much but *each teaching (or 'contact') hour should be backed up by significant periods of private study* (reading, note-taking, essay preparation and *thinking*). University teaching and learning is very different from school or college learning: contact hours are *intensive* – they should be used to develop and refine ideas you've already started to form in advance. To make the most of seminars and lectures you'll need plenty of time to prepare and to reflect after discussion.

Use your private study time carefully and systematically: read and think hard about the topics studied and also record your ideas in writing, building up structured notes. This will help your understanding (you may think you understand a topic, but try writing about it... !); and of course it is good preparation for writing essays and examination answers.

Working Together

You will get to know and work with other students in various contexts: most formally in seminars; but you will be encouraged to develop less formal working relationships, too. A 'critical friend' is someone (one of your immediate peers, i.e. a member of your own cohort, or someone in a different year) you are comfortable talking to and with whom you can discuss philosophy. The mutual benefits of critical friendship are numerous: amongst other things, critical friends act as sounding boards for each other's ideas and arguments, help each other to formulate those ideas and arguments orally and in writing, build strong independent working habits (working together on ideas, rather than relying on what lecturers or tutors say), and help you to feel part of an intellectual community rather than just an individual working away in isolation. Philosophy is all about exchanging and challenging ideas, and nobody reaches their full potential in the discipline without talking to others about what they are working on – professional philosophers do it almost constantly, and you should get into the habit of doing it early on.

Feedback and Advice Times (Office Hours)

All of your lecturers and seminar tutors will have [Feedback and Advice hours](#). You should use these to supplement your private study. If there is something you are struggling with, you can go along to one of these sessions to work with your lecturer or seminar tutor one-to-one. You should not only use these opportunities when the time comes to write an essay; you should also use them throughout the module – these are some of the most useful contact times you will have, because you get to set the agenda and talk about what *you* find most interesting or difficult in the module. These are also great opportunities to try out ideas and talk philosophy – they're not just a resource for when you are stuck!

IT use

There are computer rooms across the campus. We will usually communicate with you via email to your university account, so check that account regularly. All your written work must be word-processed and you'll be submitting work online, so you need at least these basic IT skills.

You can find details of the [IT training](#) available for students. If you don't own a computer, check out Library pages - as some IT equipment will be made [available to loan](#).

Your written work

Writing philosophy well does not come easily; it is a skill that everyone has to learn, and even experienced philosophers find it hard at times. You will do some work on philosophy-specific writing skills in Semester 1.

The important things are to write *clearly* and to *argue* for a *particular answer* to the question you have been set, explaining carefully why you think this is correct. Unless you have specifically been asked to do so, do not just report what another writer has said, or describe all the possible answers to the question. Don't be woolly, or try to sound profound at the cost of clarity. You should argue for a firm conclusion. In the first year you will receive written feedback on all your essays, and in some cases tutors will offer you a tutorial to discuss their comments. *Always* take these opportunities to learn. But please don't think of written work as something that you do only for assessment: practising writing clearly and accurately is an essential part of your private study. You might find it useful, for example, to write up your notes at the end of each week into a short essay on the topic covered.

At a more basic level, make sure that you understand the words you use, that your writing is grammatical, and that your spelling is correct. This may seem obvious, but it is important to get these basic points right, and your tutors will mark your work down if it is full of errors. If you know or suspect that you have a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, contact the [Disability Support Office](#) so that we can ensure that you receive appropriate advice and support.

Submitting written work

We have rules about submitting written work, which you must follow. These are to help us mark and give feedback on the work, to ensure fairness and to prevent cheating. Below we have listed key points - but please make sure you have read our [Philosophy Assessment](#) guide available on our website and be sure to come back to this section once you have work to submit:

- Your essays should always be word-processed (there are computer rooms across campus if you do not have your own computer). Back up your work, and keep an electronic copy of the final version in a cloud storage system, on an external hard drive or on a memory stick – this is essential (not least because failure of IT equipment is not an acceptable reason for submitting work late).
- On non-assessed ('formative') work, include your name and that of the seminar tutor for whom you have written the work.
- Assessed ('summative') work is marked anonymously. When submitting via VLE please DO NOT include your student number, DO NOT write your 'Y' candidate number, DO NOT write your name anywhere on, or within, the submission file. Department staff are able to identify the work, when you submit.

- Include a word count: Every submitted essay must declare the number of words it contains (its 'word count') at the top of the first page. Essays which do not carry a word count will not be accepted until one is added. Unless you're told otherwise, the word count is the total number of words an essay contains excluding only the bibliography. *All* other text must be included in the word count. This includes any quotations, footnotes, notes and appendices.

If you declare a word count that exceeds the word limit you will be penalized, as above. If we think that the word count is inaccurate, we will check your essay; in addition we may select some essays for random checking.

If we need to check an essay we will ask you for an electronic version in Microsoft Word. Where an essay is over length and declares a word count that understates its true length, you will have to submit electronic copies of all assessed essays submitted for that and subsequent deadlines.

- Keep within the upper word limit set for the work. For instance, if you are asked to write 'two 1,500–2,000 word essays' the upper word limit for each essay is 2,000 words. If you over-run the word limit, you will be penalized, as follows:

Over-run greater than	Over-run less than or equal to	Penalty applied to agreed mark for essay
0% of upper word limit	15% of upper word limit	5 marks
16% of upper word limit	50% of upper word limit	10 marks
51% of upper word limit	100% of upper word limit	a final mark of 0 awarded

- All quotations from or use of other writers' work must be properly referenced. We prefer you to use the 'Harvard' or 'MLA' referencing systems, which is explained at the [University's Academic Integrity](#) site.
- Include a list of references at the end of your essay. This must include all those works that you have referred to in your essay, presented in alphabetical order of author's surname.
- Avoid plagiarism: Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of the words and/or ideas of others, whether from books, online material, other students' work or any other source. *Plagiarism is a serious offence*, since it undermines learning and assessment by allowing the plagiarist to present him/herself as having skills and knowledge s/he probably lacks. It's cheating, it's easy to detect, and *if you plagiarise the consequences for your degree can be very serious indeed*. Fortunately plagiarism is also easy to avoid, by taking care over referencing and reference lists. The online *Academic Integrity Tutorial* explains more.
- Meet deadlines. You will be told the deadlines applying to any written work, and you must meet them (make sure you know the *time* as well as the *date* of the deadline: in Philosophy, deadlines **are always 10 am** on the deadline date; *other departments have different deadline*

times, though). If you will be unable to submit a summative (assessed) assessment on time, and this is for reasons to do with genuinely exceptional circumstances, you can apply for an extension using the [Exceptional Circumstances affecting Assessment \(ECA\) procedure](#). Please note that these applications should be made *before* the deadline, and that (aside from the self-certification provisions explained at the site linked to) applications will be assessed based on evidence provided, and might not be granted. Please read the policy carefully. We will not grant extensions for quite trivial, predictable or avoidable reasons, e.g. computer breakdown (you should be backing up your work), late nights, sporting fixtures, forgetfulness or holidays.

Tutors are not obliged to give feedback on formative work which is submitted late. All work submitted late, without valid Exceptional Circumstances, will be penalised and have a percentage of the marks deducted. Work that is submitted one hour late (i.e. submitted between 12:00.01 and 13:00.00) will have a 5% (or 5 mark) penalty applied to their mark. After one hour, for example from 13:00.01 on the deadline date, and up to 12:00.00 noon the following day (i.e. 24 hours after the original deadline), 10% (or 10 marks) will be deducted from their mark. For example, if your work is awarded a mark of 57/100 but is up to one day late, the final mark is 47. Work more than five days late is marked at zero.

Please refer to [Philosophy Assessment](#) guide available on our website.

Beyond your course

Make the most of your time at university. You are unlikely ever again to have the same opportunities to develop your skills, try out new activities or build your confidence by taking on new responsibilities. This is all part of learning and developing, and it will count when you finally head out into the world looking for work (sorry to raise this delicate topic, but the time will come). Be realistic and don't over-commit yourself, but do look for positive and worthwhile ways of using your time outside your course. The University offers *The York Award* to recognize students' training and achievements in areas beyond their formal study. You can find out more about it on [York Award](#) pages.

Programme Learning Outcomes

Work on your degree is designed to help you towards a range of 'Programme Learning Outcomes' (PLOs) specific to your degree programme. What does that mean? Simply that by the end of your degree, if you have participated fully, you should have certain skills and be able to do certain things. The Programme Learning Outcomes for single subject Philosophy are listed below; joint ('combined honours') degrees involving philosophy each have their own set of Programme Learning Outcomes, but since they involve substantial philosophy components these will contain at least some PLOs closely related to those for single subject Philosophy, especially the 'core' Philosophy PLOs 1 to 4.

By the end of the degree, single subject Philosophy students should be able to:

- (1) Understand and explain key problems, issues, and debates across a wide range of areas of philosophy and its history—including some at the forefront of contemporary work—and communicate complex and difficult ideas in clear, precise, and accessible terms in a variety of formats
- (2) Develop and articulate ranges of alternative solutions to problems and issues in an open-minded and imaginative way, and establish ways of making progress in answering questions even where it is unclear in the first instance how to proceed or what the standards for a good answer to the question might be
- (3) Develop and articulate systematic, logical arguments for and against the alternative solutions considered in relation to a particular problem, subjecting key concepts and principles to critical scrutiny and presenting the best case that can be made for each proposal
- (4) Make a measured judgement about what is the best view on a particular problem and present a sustained line of argument in defence of this judgement based on careful consideration of what can be said for and against the proposed solutions
- (5) Work effectively and productively as a thinker and learner, individually and in collaboration with others—planning and scheduling, seeking help where appropriate, initiating and pursuing projects, and working collaboratively with others in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding
- (6) Amend and develop their practice as thinkers and learners in the light of critical reflection, advice, and feedback—identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and developing strategies for making improvements in performance
- (7) Demonstrate informed sensitivity to cultural and historical context in interpreting and responding to the work and ideas of others
- (8) Critically engage with social, political, cultural, ethical, and value issues to contribute to the solution of key contemporary problems by applying philosophical methods and insights

Joint degree students will develop similar abilities through the philosophy component of their degree programme.

Remember that in your first year you will be starting your journey towards acquiring these abilities. They are the Programme Learning *Outcomes*, so you should not expect to be able to do these things to a high level at the end of your first year. Work in your first year is organised with these desired outcomes in mind, but as you progress the work we ask you to do will change as you become more able and confident.

Your course requirements

The modular structure: assessment and progression

All degree courses at York are organised into modules, and students normally gain 20 credits for each module successfully completed, reflecting the work required. You must take 120 credits in each year; joint honours students obtain some of their credits from Philosophy modules and some from their other subjects.

Each module is assessed by essays, by formal examination, by both or (in the case of an element of Beginning Philosophical Research) by presentation or (in the case of the second year Philosophy and Society module) by podcast, and you need to pass enough of these assessments to pass the modules, accumulate the 120 credits and progress to the next stage of your programme. So, although marks from your first year Philosophy modules do not count towards your final degree classification, your first year performance must be satisfactory in order for you to progress to the second year.

The pass mark for each module is 40. If you fail a module assessment (below 30) you will have to be reassessed, but there is a limit to the amount of reassessment allowed. Reassessment normally takes place in York in August. If you marginally fail a module (30–39), you may not need to be reassessed if your overall performance for the year is good enough to compensate. Again, there is a limit to the amount of compensation which is allowed.

For a guide to the University's progression rules, see the *Guide to Progression and Final Degree Classification*, under [Assessment guides](#).

You will get results and feedback regularly throughout the year, and will be formally notified by the end of July whether you have completed the first year satisfactorily, or need to be reassessed in any module. If you are at all concerned about your progress, please speak to your supervisor as soon as possible—they are there to help.

Exceptional circumstances

You should keep your supervisor informed of any issues affecting your work, especially if you think that your performance in assessment may be affected by *exceptional circumstances*. The University defines an exceptional circumstance as a problem that you have encountered which goes beyond the normal difficulties experienced in life and which has affected your academic performance adversely during the assessment period for which you are claiming.

You notify the department of exceptional circumstances by submitting an Exceptional Circumstances Claim Form by the appropriate deadline. Details will remain confidential and will be disclosed only to those considering or administering the claim. A successful claim will not change your mark, but sometimes means that you can be reassessed in a module 'as if for the first time'. See details of the [exceptional circumstances policy](#), the claim form and the deadlines for claims.

Your first year modules

Which modules you study in your first year depends on which degree course you are taking. The requirements for each course are outlined below, and the modules are described in the next section. Full details can be found in [Undergraduate programme specifications](#).

First year modules

The Philosophy modules running in your 1st year are listed and briefly described below. You will not take all of these modules, though: to see which modules are part of your particular programme, you can check your eVision account or look at the relevant course page:

- [Single Subject Philosophy](#)
- [Philosophy with Sociology](#)
- [Philosophy & Linguistics](#)
- [Language, Logic & Communication](#)
- [Philosophy with Languages & Cultures](#)
- [Mathematics & Philosophy](#)
- [Physics with Philosophy](#)
- [History & Philosophy](#)
- [English & Philosophy](#)
- [BSc PPE](#)
- [BA PPE](#)
- [Philosophy & Politics](#)
- [Economics & Philosophy](#)

Your module activities will also show up on your timetable for each semester.

On many programmes at York, you have the opportunity to step outside your degree and expand your knowledge by taking a module from a different department or school. We call these 'elective modules'. If you are interested in taking any - please visit [Studying beyond your department](#) pages to find out more. You can also ask your Academic supervisor for advice.

We would have asked you already for your choice of Option modules. If for any reason you would like to change the selection you made previously. We will try to accommodate. To apply please [complete this form](#). Final deadline for Semester 2 option is 5 pm (UK time) on Friday 21st February 2025.

Semester 1

Philosophical Analysis

This module has two main aims: it introduces you to various aspects of how arguments work, and their purposes; and it also gives you plenty of practice and support in the close reading of texts, to work out what they are saying (before, of course, trying to decide whether what they are saying is correct - partly by analysing the arguments they are presenting). Lectures will provide background context for the texts you are reading closely in seminars, and explain various aspects of informal argumentation theory. In the seminars, you will be using what has

been explained in the lectures to help you interpret and understand the set texts. You will then be expected to critically evaluate the arguments and ideas you find in them.

Knowledge & Perception

This module introduces some fundamental issues in epistemology (the theory of knowledge). In the first part of the module we will consider what knowledge is. In the second part, we will explore some philosophical puzzles and problems about ways of acquiring knowledge, including perception.

Power & Consent

Who has power over you, and have you consented to that? A state has great power over its citizens. It can enforce its laws and punish those who disobey. Some political philosophers have thought that people's consent is required to make this political power legitimate. But can consent make power legitimate, and if so, what kind of consent can do that? Beyond the state's power, what are the limits to what we can consent to between individuals? And how do existing power relations between people complicate the validity of consent in various contexts? We will investigate these questions over the course of the module, in order to shed light on the complicated relationship between power and consent.

Semester 2

Reason & Argument

As a philosopher, you'll need to be able to tell good arguments from bad. In this module, you will study one of the most important ways for an argument to be good: an argument is valid if, but only if, it is impossible for its premises to be true and its conclusion to be false. You will learn how to take arguments written in ordinary English, and symbolise them in formal languages that better reveal their logical forms. Then you will learn how to test these formal arguments for validity. Along the way, you'll be introduced to a host of key logical concepts that are used in all branches of philosophy.

Ethics

This module involves considering some of the following questions: Is morality subjective or objective? (Hard question? Some forms of subjectivism, the view that morality has to do with how we feel about things, are, it turns out, quite objective.) Should you help more people rather than fewer? (Many think that's an easy question to answer. It is not.) What on earth is axiology? Why might lotteries be a splendid idea for distributing resources? (Aristotle knew, and evolutionary psychology shows, how important fairness is.) Is every moral theory a form of consequentialism? (Answer: No, but it takes work to figure out why not.) Why should one fly less and buy less even if one's contribution makes no difference whatsoever? (After all, you must fly an awful lot (on your private jet plane) to actually make a difference to global

warming.) What does philosophy have to say about climate change? (If we can't solve the so-called Non-Identity Problem, there won't be much wrong with leaving a depleted and overheating planet to the next generations; however, we know it is wrong, very wrong, so we had better tackle this problem!) Is it okay to kill animals in their millions or billions? (After all, as Cora Diamond says, we are at the table and they are on the table.) It's not the aim of this module to change the world; we need to understand it. No (or at most little) repeat of A-level material. Independent thinking required. A genuine interest in understanding ethical issues is a plus.

Free Will

Free will is the idea that we have a certain kind of control over our actions, that when we do something, we could have done otherwise. This idea seems practically very important, but theoretically fragile. If we are not free, our lives make no sense. But there seems to be good reason to think we are not free. In this module, we investigate the problem of free will, and we use it as a jumping off point for some of the most fundamental questions in philosophy, including questions in metaphysics, ethics and about the nature of philosophy.

Beginning Philosophical Research

This module involves more independent study. In one part of it, you will conduct your own research into the ideas of a particular philosopher of your choice (from an approved list), supported by a member of academic staff who will be assigned to meet with you to discuss your progress and direct you. The culmination of this research will be a poster presentation.

Contact Us

Starting at University can be daunting, leaving students needing guidance on where to seek help and support. This handbook has been designed to cover most of the information and signposting you should need during your first year. However, that is not to say we can't help if it's not covered. We have several full-time Professional service staff available to help with the unexpected. Should you be unsure who to contact or where to find out specific information, The Student Services or your Supervisor should be your first point of contact. Between them, they can help or signpost you in the right direction.

Thought listed earlier in the handbook, the contact information is:

Department of Philosophy
University of York
Heslington
York YO10 5DD
Tel: 01904 323251
E-mail: philosophy@york.ac.uk

Reading Suggestions Appendix

Part of what makes studying philosophy exciting is that there are no 'starter problems' like there are in maths, for example: in philosophy, the things you start by thinking about are the

difficult, interesting questions which are also still at the cutting edge of the subject! So, whilst you can increasingly find text-book style introductions to philosophy, one of the best ways to get into the subject is still to read some texts by philosophers who are wrestling with various puzzles.

There are links to online versions of some of the suggestions below; but where there is no link, various editions of the works listed can be bought quite cheaply online. (Note that you will not have to buy any of the texts you need for your course yourself: these will all be available through the University Library, usually online.)

Some classics which are often recommended to those starting out in philosophy (but which continue to be interesting whatever stage you are at!) include:

[Plato](#) (c. 429-347 BCE)

Try one or more of the short dialogues – e.g. the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Meno* and *Phaedo* are all available in various editions individually, or collected together in *Five Dialogues* (published by Hackett) – or *The Republic* (which is much longer). Plato writes ‘dialogues’ which are like scripts for a play, and he sometimes presents his own arguments through the words of Socrates who talks to various people about all sorts of things, trying to understand those things better. So, for example, the *Meno* deals with how we can ever learn anything, the *Phaedo* is about the soul, the *Crito* is about obligations to obey those in political power and the *Republic* ranges over epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, political philosophy and philosophy of art. The *Apology* is supposed to be a record of Socrates’s defence at his trial, where he was sentenced to death for ‘corrupting the youth of the city’ with his questioning of received wisdom, and for ‘denying the city’s Gods’.

[Rene Descartes](#), *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641)

This is a classic text of ‘early modern’ (i.e. C17th & C18th) philosophy, and it deals with knowledge and metaphysics as well as some arguments for the existence of God.

[David Hume](#), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) and/or *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751)

These works by Hume are slightly more accessible, but still very good, presentations of the ideas in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, and both the *Treatise* and these *Enquiries* are classics of ‘early modern’ (i.e. C17th & C18th) philosophy. The *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* deals with knowledge (including discussions of ‘inductive’ or probabilistic reasoning, and an interesting discussion of the evidence for miracles), whilst the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* deals with ethics.

[Mary Wollstonecraft](#), *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

This is a classic of feminist philosophy (though its arguments are not uncontroversial by any means amongst feminist theorists), and it makes many astute observations about the plight in society of both women and men of different social classes.

[John Stuart Mill](#), *On Liberty* (1859)

On Liberty is short and has been very influential not just in philosophy but also in politics, law and society more widely. Mill defends a liberal political philosophy and discusses the proper limits of freedom.

[Bertrand Russell](#), *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912)

Part introduction, part original philosophy, this is perhaps the most accessible of the works by a key figure in early twentieth-century philosophy. It is mainly about epistemology, metaphysics and philosophy of mind/perception.

Some twentieth century and more recent things which you might find interesting include:

[Thomas Nagel](#), *Mortal Questions* (1979)

This is a collection of essays by a leading C20th philosopher, and it includes discussions of various issues in philosophy including consciousness, equality and the meaning of life. It includes his classic essay 'What is it like to be a bat?', which isn't just about being a bat!

[Peter Singer](#), *Practical Ethics* (1st ed. 1979)

This is a nice introduction to some key debates in moral philosophy, with some really interesting ideas. Singer is a well-known and sometimes controversial contemporary moral philosopher.

[Matthew Ratcliffe](#), 'The Feeling of Being', *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 8-10 (2005)

[You can access this here](#). This is an example (by one of our York professors!) of 'phenomenology', which is all about paying close attention to describing the nature of our experience. The terms 'intentional' and 'intentionality' are used here in their common philosophical sense, to mean roughly the idea of being *about* something, or directed at something: so, thoughts are *intentional* when or because they are about something (such as a particular person).

[Eleanor Stump](#), *Wandering in Darkness*, Chapter 5: 'The Nature of Love' (2010).

[You can access this here](#). The book is about the problem of evil in philosophy of religion, but this chapter is an interesting discussion of love. It starts with a brief survey of some recent ideas about the nature of love, then presents Aquinas's ideas about love. So, it is an example of philosophical psychology, philosophy of religion, and medieval philosophy scholarship – from a leading contemporary philosopher of religion and Aquinas expert.

[L. A. Paul](#), 'What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting', *Res Philosophica*, Volume 92, Issue 2 (2015)

[You can access this here](#). It is a really interesting recent paper on rational decision making about things which change your life so much that you cannot predict what things will be like afterwards (such as having children).

[Amia Srinivasan](#), 'The Aptness of Anger', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2018)

[You can access this here](#). It is a discussion of the ways in which getting angry about injustice can be a good thing regardless of whether getting angry helps to change things.

