

Philosophy : National 5

What is knowledge ? How can I be certain ? Do others exist ? How can I learn to reason well ? What makes for a good argument ? How do I know whether I have been sold a dodgy conclusion ? Are there things that are always morally wrong ? Why do people disagree over moral behaviour ?

These are some of the questions that Philosophy asks and seeks to answer. Philosophy challenges the student to think clearly about problems by asking questions about the world we live in. In this course we seek to introduce you to philosophical positions and theories relating to issues of relevance in the world today.

The course is made up of 3 units. Each unit is designed not just to develop a basic knowledge and understanding of philosophy and philosophers but to achieve a more important purpose i.e. how to think. Thinking involves developing analytical and evaluative skills central to doing philosophy.

The 3 units are :

1. Knowledge and Doubt
2. Moral Philosophy
3. Arguments in Action

Knowledge and Doubt

We think we have knowledge, but can we be certain ? In this unit we explore this key question that has occupied philosophical thinkers for thousands of years. We examine the solutions of Plato, Descartes and Hume. We evaluate the role of the senses and reason in providing a basis for knowledge.

Moral Philosophy

How do we decide between right and wrong ? In this unit we examine the 2 major theories of Utilitarianism and Kant. We will discuss a range of moral dilemmas that face us today. We will analyse how each theory approaches the problem and evaluate its solution. Common everyday issues such as lying, stealing, crime and punishment, euthanasia, genetic engineering, may be explored.

Arguments In Action

Everyone likes to discuss and argue. Argument is at the heart of Philosophy. By argument we don't mean a heated disagreement between individuals. Philosophers do get passionate when they argue. However, when they 'argue' they try to discuss rationally and calmly. In this unit we learn the techniques Philosophy has developed to help us pinpoint the things, such as premises and conclusions, that make up an argument. We learn to spot assumptions and fallacies that might undermine an argument. We learn what makes for a good argument and how to construct one.

Whilst learning the key elements of philosophical argument comprises a separate unit, you will be expected to apply these skills throughout the whole course.

Philosophy : Higher Grade

For anyone going onto further education a Higher Grade Philosophy provides them with the challenge of a course that seeks to understand the development of human thought. Philosophy encourages people to engage in discussion and debate about ideas to help us understand the world we live in. Thus, whilst you will be required to have knowledge and understanding of key philosophical issues, discussion is central to the course.

The course consists of 3 units :

1. Knowledge and Doubt
2. Moral Philosophy
3. Arguments in Action

Knowledge and Doubt

Can we ever know anything for certain ? This was the major problem that faced Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle over 2,500 years ago. Faced with the challenge of scepticism, that nothing could be absolutely certain, they sought to provide us with a solid foundation for acquiring knowledge of our world. Even today the debate rages on. Can our senses provide us with a sufficient basis for knowledge ? Is reason alone all that is required ? In this unit we examine and evaluate the 2 major traditions of Western thinking i.e. Rationalism and Empiricism. We explore the solutions of eminent philosophers such as Descartes and Hume. We will analyse and evaluate how these approaches provide us with the grounds for knowledge, including the implications for all areas of learning.

Moral Philosophy

What makes an action morally wrong ? Is there such a thing as an evil act ? Are there moral rules that never change ? What about individual and societal rights ? Is it ever right to lie , take a life or break the law ? These are some of the questions that might face us today when having to decide how to act. Moral Philosophy seeks to help us understand and analyse the grounds we have for our moral actions. We analyse and evaluate in detail three normative theories. They are :

1. Virtue Ethics
2. Kantian Ethics
3. Utilitarianism.

Central to this unit will be a consideration of how these theories deal with typical moral problems we face in everyday life. We will evaluate the views of philosophers such as Aristotle, Kant, Bentham and Mill.

Arguments In action

When we think of an argument we usually think of a heated discussion. This is not what it means in Philosophy. Certainly philosophers get passionate about things they value. However, when they 'argue' they seek to deal with an issue in a calm and rational manner. Such an approach involves

identifying the key features of an 'argument'. Such features include premises and conclusions. Then the philosopher will try to look for assumptions or weaknesses in the argument. Is the argument based on a false dilemma such as 'Either you agree with me or you don't' ? Or does it make a logical error ? Such weaknesses are called fallacies.

By identifying assumptions and fallacies Philosophy seeks to clarify our thinking, thus enabling us to reason more effectively. Consequently, the skills we develop in this unit apply throughout the whole course. You will be expected to reason more effectively and apply these skills to everyday life arguments. You will also employ them in evaluating the epistemological and moral problems covered in the other units.