

PH146-15 Reason, Argument and Analysis

24/25

Department

Philosophy

Level

Undergraduate Level 1

Module leader

Lorenzo Serini

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

We rely on our ability to reason and justify our beliefs in almost every aspect of our lives. This ability is important not only for thinking well on our own but also for thinking with others. By giving our reasons, we can convince others or at least make our positions better understood. By listening and trying to understand others' reasons, we can better understand their positions and even be convinced by them. This exchange of reasons can be a powerful tool for broadening our understanding of the world and ourselves, changing people's minds (including our own), increasing our understanding of others, and even promoting cooperation.

However, human beings are not always very good at doing this; we are surrounded by examples of bad reasoning that has the power to infect our ability to think clearly and rationally. For example, the misleading advertisements promising to transform our lives that convince us to buy something we don't need, or the irrelevant personal attacks made during debates that lead us to doubt the concrete evidence presented.

Through weekly exercises, you will develop the art of rational persuasion by practising the necessary skills for good quality philosophical argument. By focusing on key issues in applied philosophy, philosophical methods and metaphilosophy, we will see how these skills are utilised in philosophical debate.

Module aims

The aim of this module is to help you to identify, evaluate and criticise different philosophical methods and argumentative strategies in complex texts and help you to develop your own philosophical arguments.

The module has been designed to help students develop the skills they need to prepare them for their degree and enable them to fulfil their philosophical potential. The skills acquired on this course will serve as a foundation to all other philosophy modules and will help students to take a robust philosophical approach to their studies. The module is designed to help students work independently during the course of their degree, building valuable reading, analysis of argument and writing skills. The module will also help students to identify the transferable skills at the heart of their study of philosophy.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

In the module, we will start by thinking about what philosophy is and about its value as a discipline. Having established the central role of argument in philosophy as well as in our lives, we will understand what arguments are (and are not), and how to identify, reconstruct, analyse, evaluate and create them.

We will then consider arguments in the philosophical debate on a variety of topics. These may include euthanasia, abortion, genetic engineering and climate change, among other 'real world' problems. In exploring these issues, we will also look at argumentative strategies and methods that are instrumental in learning how to do philosophy.

Finally, we also look at essential study skills such as research and essay writing skills.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Identify and reconstruct arguments into standard form and argument maps, deploying acquired logical and interpretative skills
- Accurately deploy concepts of argument evaluation
- Understand how to go about close-reading philosophical texts
- Deploy skills of argument identification reconstruction and evaluation to the understanding and assessment of arguments presented in philosophical works
- Fruitfully and efficiently utilise the library and other available research resources, e.g., e-journals, in conducting independent research
- Identify and critically assess different philosophical methodologies
- Present philosophical argument and ideas in a clear and concise way, both orally and in written form, and respond to criticism of philosophical argument
- Employ research, presentation, logical, and interpretative skills gained on the course.
- Work effectively as part of a group on a joint project

Indicative reading list

We will draw on some of the following in providing examples and as the focus of discussion of philosophical methodology:

Bourget, David & Chalmers, David J. (2014). What do philosophers believe? *Philosophical Studies* 170 (3):465-500.

Chalmers, David J. (2015). Why Isn't There More Progress in Philosophy? *Philosophy* 90 (1):3-31.

Cooper, Rachel (2005). Thought experiments. *Metaphilosophy* 36 (3):328-347.

Crane, Tim (2012). What is the Problem of Non-Existence? *Philosophia* 40 (3):417-434.

Daniels, N. (1979) "Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics", *Journal of Philosophy* 76(5): 256–82.

DePaul, M. (2005), "Intuitions and Moral Inquiry", in D. Copp (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: ch. 21.

Gendler, Tamar Szabo (2000). *Thought Experiment: On the Powers and Limits of Imaginary Cases*. Routledge.

Grice, H. P. (1989). *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kagan, S. (2001) "Thinking About Cases", *Social Philosophy and Policy* 18(2): 44–63.

Nozick, Robert (1981). *Philosophical Explanations*. Harvard University Press.

Shafer-Landau, Russ (1995). Vagueness, Borderline Cases and Moral Realism. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1):83 - 96.

Sinnott-Armstrong, Walter (1999). Explanation and Justification in Moral Epistemology. *The Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy* 1:117-127.

Thomson, J. J. (1985) "The Trolley Problem", *Yale Law Journal* 94(6): 1395-1415.

[View reading list on Talis Aspire](#)

Research element

Students are provided with research training (delivered by colleagues from the library) and are required to complete a group research project.

Subject specific skills

- Researching philosophical topics
- Understanding a range of philosophical tools and methods, e.g. standard form, argument maps, argument by analogy, narratives
- Understanding the ways in which philosophers use the variety of tools and methods
- Close-reading of philosophical texts

- Understanding how to critically evaluate philosophical argument (including concepts of validity and soundness)

Transferable skills

- Work effectively in a group
 - Effective oral presentation skills (presenting complex arguments clearly and concisely)
 - Using research tools and referencing accurately
 - Analysing and evaluating complex arguments
 - Summarising complex texts
 - Understanding the value of philosophy for other domains
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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Seminars	8 sessions of 2 hours (11%)
Private study	125 hours (83%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

No private study requirements defined for this module.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A6

	Weighting	Study time
Oral Presentation	20%	
Delivered in 2-3s		

	Weighting	Study time
Literature Review	20%	
Locate sources on a topic of choice (providing accurate bibliographical information and sample references), and provide a brief explanation for the inclusion of each source. Students will be assessed for key skills in researching and referencing sources.		
Essay (1500)	60%	
1,500 word essay.		

Feedback on assessment

- Formative: Students will have the opportunity to get feedback on a draft version of their presentation and on plans of their essays. They will also receive feedback on one draft literature review entry.
- Summative: Written feedback will be provided on the presentation, literature review, and essays.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core for:

- UPHA-V700 Undergraduate Philosophy
 - Year 1 of V700 Philosophy
 - Year 1 of V700 Philosophy

This module is Optional for:

- Year 1 of UPHA-VL78 BA in Philosophy with Psychology
- Year 1 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 1 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 1 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 1 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
- UIPA-V5L8 Undergraduate Philosophy and Global Sustainable Development
 - Year 1 of V5L8 Philosophy and Global Sustainable Development
 - Year 1 of V5L8 Philosophy and Global Sustainable Development
- Year 1 of UPHA-VQ72 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature
- Year 1 of UPHA-VQ52 Undergraduate Philosophy, Literature and Classics
- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 1 of V7MR Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite with Economics Major)
 - Year 1 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)
 - Year 1 of V7MP Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Bipartite)

- Year 1 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
- Year 1 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
- Year 1 of V7ML Philosophy, Politics and Economics (Tripartite)
- UPHA-V7MW Undergraduate Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 1 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law
 - Year 1 of V7MW Politics, Philosophy and Law