

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

# QUESTIONING ANSWERS

“At Reading you will explore a wide range of topics in philosophy. We teach classic philosophy in the Western tradition, looking at the major figures from the ancient world through to contemporary times. We also teach philosophy in the Eastern tradition and explore the diversity of thinking across the globe.



You will learn the skills of critical thinking – sifting good arguments from bad arguments, questioning assumptions, exploring diverse answers to the most difficult and puzzling problems.

Yet philosophy is not just about getting to grips with abstract problems and paradoxes. It is about the real world and its challenges. What separates logic from propaganda? What moral duties might we owe to future generations? Will artificial intelligence ever replicate the human mind? How should we live? What is a meaningful life? We will help you develop the skills and conceptual tools to work out the answers for yourselves.

We look forward to discussing philosophy with you at Reading. ”

**Professor David Oderberg**

Head of the Department of Philosophy

[reading.ac.uk/philosophy](http://reading.ac.uk/philosophy)

“Philosophers should be, as Seneca put it, ‘lawyers for humanity’. Make what you think and feel count; the examined life has global dimensions.”

**Martha C. Nussbaum**  
American philosopher

# FAIR ENOUGH?

“ Ideas about fairness ripple through our everyday thinking, and we often find ourselves criticising practices, attitudes and judgments when they are unfair, but do we really know what it means to be ‘fair’? ”



**Dr Charlotte Newey**

Since fairness is such a widely used concept, Dr Charlotte Newey hopes her research will have impact on our world.

You only need to read political manifestos or listen to political debates to observe disagreements about what is fair and what fairness requires. ‘For some, fairness means paying people according to what they produce. For others, it means ensuring all people have an opportunity to develop their ability to produce or create. Others suggest fairness should be understood in terms of people getting what they need. But policies to ensure that people get what they need would look very different to those that ensure people get opportunities, or get paid according to their productivity.’ Such debate leads to lively discussions between Charlotte and her students.

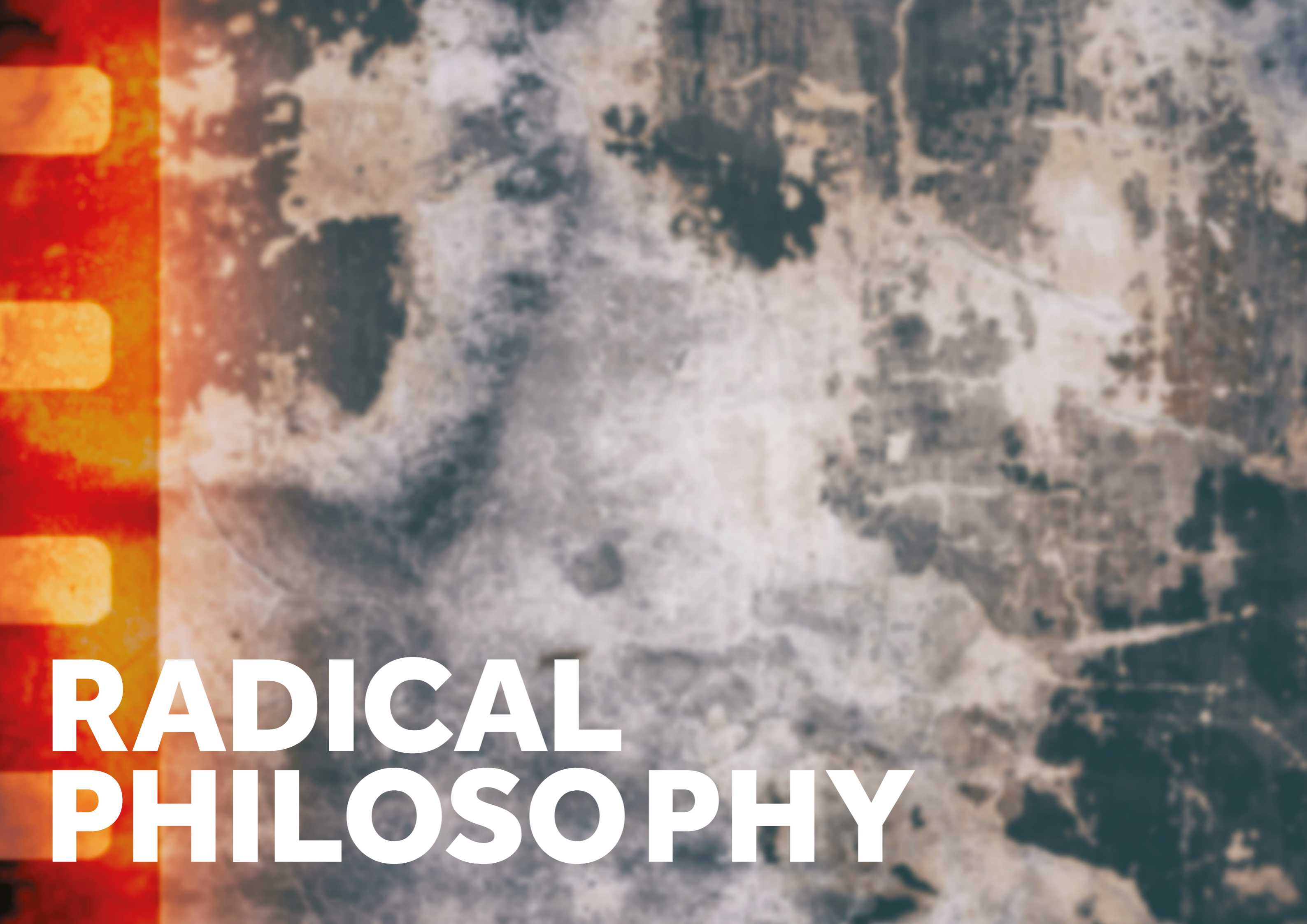
While studying for her BA Philosophy at the University of Reading, Charlotte and her friends enjoyed philosophical debates on complex questions such as ‘do we have free will?’, ‘can you be harmed after you die?’, ‘what it is to be “me”?’ and ‘are we morally obliged to help other people much more than we typically do?’. These exciting discussions inspired her to do her PhD in philosophy at the University of Reading to explore the philosophical topics of fairness, moral demands, and global poverty.

During her PhD, Charlotte became particularly interested in burdens that fall to whole groups of people such as the global issue of climate change. ‘Of course, individuals can take action to reduce their own carbon footprint. But impactful change needs

collaborative action and high compliance with carbon reducing guidance. So, what should you do if you are already reducing your own carbon footprint and others aren’t? Should you give up your car and holidays, and change your diet? Why should you do more in the face of others doing less? One answer might be that in doing more, you might have a greater impact. If that’s right, there might be a moral obligation on you to do more. But is that fair?’

Charlotte’s research feeds directly into her teaching, both in her second-year module ‘Oppression, Inequality, and the Enemies of Democracy’ and her third-year module ‘Fairness’. She encourages students to use real-world examples when debating philosophical concepts such as how to allocate scarce medical resources. If there are not enough resources to go around, do you give to the neediest patients, or to those you are likely to help the most? Is there any difference in the fairness of giving small benefits to a large number of patients with minor ailments or to a very few patients with particularly complex health needs? As is so often the case, there is no simple answer, but it certainly helps if we have a clearer understanding of fairness.

Students regularly praise Charlotte for her teaching and support, and she has consequently received multiple nominations for the Reading University Student Union Excellence Awards for her interactive, inclusive and enthusiastic teaching style.



# **RADICAL PHILOSOPHY**



“ Working with my students has opened my eyes to many new, fascinating areas of research that I would otherwise have completely overlooked. ”



**Professor Maximilian de Gaynesford**

**Professor Max de Gaynesford specialises in philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, aesthetics and philosophy of literature. He strongly advocates the idea of teaching-led research, alongside the more familiar approach of research-led teaching.**

This method gives Max the opportunity to connect research questions and classic philosophical debates on the one hand, and important problems that we're grappling with in contemporary life on the other. Max's students explore interests and raise questions that allow him to dig deeper. He encourages his students to consider the subject matter from all angles without necessarily endorsing or agreeing to it.

Through his 'Radical Philosophy' module for first year students, Max familiarises his students with the idea that philosophy can be used to deal with the everyday issues they encounter, rather than to only deal with very abstract or technical questions. He also encourages students to confront their deepest beliefs and assumptions in a characteristically philosophical way. This informs students about current debates in philosophy and develops a sense of the significance of philosophical thinking in dealing with contemporary issues.

The module introduces students to non-mainstream philosophers and encourages them to compare and contrast very different ways of approaching philosophy, such as 'analytic philosophy', 'phenomenology', 'post-structuralism', 'continental philosophy', 'deconstruction', and 'postmodernism'.

Max's module, *The Scandal of Film*, on the other hand, discusses how films play a central role in our cultural life, employing philosophical investigation to explore those aspects that remain unclear. Max has worked for many years on a monograph studying the relationship of film and philosophy. His research recently included working with a student, funded by the UROP scheme. Together, they considered the philosophical issues that were raised in a particular film, such as how we think about space and time and how the combination of different filming techniques was used to represent the film's story.

Max uses a combination of lectures and seminars to stimulate group discussions and learn from his students. Teaching in this way enables him to gain a new perspective on his research and explore new areas.

# CROSSING CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

Holly Guy  
BA Philosophy Student

**Holly has always been interested in how people form their opinions and beliefs, having unearthed a fascination for Buddhism and Jainism while at school. Her curiosity inspired her to continue her studies at Reading – a path that has opened up opportunities to specialise in cross-cultural conversations using real-world examples.**

Holly was able to indulge in a variety of diverse optional modules at Reading, with her favourite being Global Philosophy. This module encouraged Holly to approach social and political issues such as race, gender, debt, war and terrorism from different perspectives by exploring different philosophical traditions.

The module enabled her to examine similarities between Western beliefs and Indian philosophies. She specifically enjoyed exploring the core Buddhist teaching of anatta, the belief that there is no real 'self' but a collection of parts and merely an illusion of a self. Holly was then able to explore connections between this teaching and Western views of gender. This helped her confidently debate exciting yet challenging questions such as 'to what extent is gender an illusion?' and 'is gender performed?'

To continue engaging with diverse global philosophical issues, Holly chose to focus her dissertation on the connections between utilitarianism and Buddhism with reference to the Vietnam war self-immolations (the act of setting fire to oneself in protest). She hopes to positively impact and broaden Western attitudes, according to which self-immolation is judged as unethical instead of morally permissible.

Holly's philosophical experience at Reading has empowered her to feel more connected to the world and the issues we face in the twenty-first century. She feels better-placed to analyse arguments as presented in the media, spotting when an argument is faulty. She now wants to explore the world and different cultural belief systems by travelling to Vietnam and India. Thinking about her time at Reading, Holly says 'I cannot recommend Philosophy at Reading enough. There is support everywhere you turn and the academics are extremely passionate about their work which makes learning really engaging. The Philosophy Department has helped me adapt my approach on how to discuss controversial topics and I can now confidently formulate well-justified and respectful cross-cultural discussions'.



**LIVING  
IN COLOUR**

“I am proud of the fact that my research has become thoroughly interdisciplinary, uncovering cool and unexpected facts about meaning and colour.”



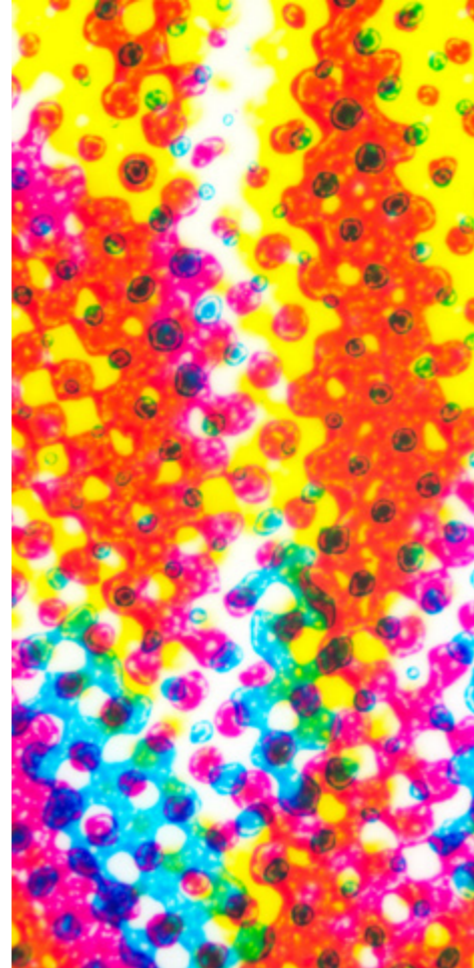
**Dr Nat Hansen**

**Nat is working across disciplines to understand the nature of linguistic meaning, leading to unexpected real-world applications.**

Nat's main research area is the philosophy of language, and he is particularly interested in the meaning of colour words, such as 'green' and 'red'. Nat believes that understanding the meanings of such words requires collaboration across academic disciplines and he works with linguists, psychologists, and researchers in the digital humanities to better understand how language and colour interact.

In his third-year module "Colour" at the University of Reading, Nat connects classic philosophical debates with contemporary findings in psychology and linguistics to ask and answer questions about whether different languages shape the way people perceive and cognise colour, and how ordinary conceptions of colour line up with our best understanding of colour science: are colours physical properties, or do they depend on our eyes and minds? Can the meanings of colour words be different for different people?

Nat's aim in his research is to improve our understanding of how experimentation in linguistics and psychology should inform theories of linguistic meaning, but his research has also had unexpected real-world applications. For example, his research on context-sensitive words inspired a graphic design firm in New York City to create a context-sensitive typeface, "Visage", which was used on T-shirts and promotional materials for the Yale University art museum.







# HOW YOU'LL LEARN

**We offer a range of learning and assessment methods, which focus on developing the skills you need for an ever-changing future.**

There are no examinations for any modules offered in the Philosophy Department. We assess you through a variety of methods – including essays, presentations, group work and blog posts – which aim to support different learning styles to enable you to reach your highest potential.

“The no-exams aspect of the course allows me to really concentrate on researching, planning and perfecting my essays, and writing something that I'm really proud of.”

**Rhiannon Snook**  
BA Philosophy

## Developing your skills

Our methods are designed to teach you the skills you need step-by-step throughout your degree, aiming to prepare you for each new module, and each new academic year, as well as your future career.

Year 1 modules focus on developing two vital skills: making your own arguments and assessing the arguments of others. We teach you to present your ideas, orally and in writing, in a clear and effective way. Year 2 modules focus on developing your skills of research and enquiry, and how to effectively present arguments in public. Year 3 modules focus on developing independent research and self-awareness.

Our courses are designed to enable you to become a fully independent learner, able to reflect critically on your progress and strengths, and on the goals you wish to achieve.



# GET REAL

**Choose from a vast breadth of modules and study philosophy connected to the world around you.**

Our interdisciplinary approach to teaching and research is grounded in the real world. The modules we teach stem directly from our academics' research, which is informed by current events and problems, such as democracy, freedom, religion and climate change.

## Thought-provoking modules

We offer considerable variety in the topics that we teach from ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy of law, to philosophy of colour, philosophy of film, and artificial intelligence.

You can either choose diverse modules to broaden your knowledge, or themed modules to focus your interests, enabling you to make an informed choice as to how to specialise as you progress through your degree.

## Explore another perspective

You can opt to study another subject alongside philosophy on our joint degrees. Popular choices include History, Classical Studies, Politics, English Literature and Psychology.

“Studying philosophy at Reading has given me greater confidence in my ability to understand, recognise and remain informed of arguments used in everyday politics, current affairs and ethics.”

**Will Burgess**  
BA and MRes in Philosophy graduate



# HANDS-ON

## Our philosophy degrees aim to prepare you for your future career

We will support you to undertake placements and gain practical, hands-on experience in a field you may be interested in. You can also apply for a paid summer placement in our Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (UROP), working with an academic on their research. There is also the opportunity to undertake a credit-bearing placement during your degree forming all or part of an optional module.

## Professional placement year

Transfer to a 4-year programme and complete a professional placement year, gaining invaluable experience and putting your knowledge into practice. Our Placement Coordinators will support you throughout securing a placement, during the placement and while transitioning back to university life.<sup>1</sup>

## Shape your future

Our degrees aim to develop your transferable skills, including: communicating ideas clearly and precisely, formulating complex problems, criticising arguments effectively, engaging in productive debate, and developing high-quality literacy skills.

Previous graduates have gone on to work in a variety of institutions, including: KPMG, the civil service, IBM, PwC, Lloyds, museums, charities and various schools and universities. Other graduates choose to continue their studies at postgraduate level.

“The Department was keen to show me opportunities outside the curriculum that enhanced my academic experience: lectures, conferences, workshops, summer schools and seminars. This gave me the edge I needed in applying successfully to Oxbridge master’s programmes.”

**Harry Tappenden**  
BA Philosophy

<sup>1</sup> Subject to availability, see inside back cover.



# IT'S WHAT WE DO

## Community is at the heart of our Department and we strive to create a friendly and inclusive environment.

Students and staff regularly socialise in relaxed, informal settings. Enjoyable social events mark the year, from Welcome Week right through to the end-of-year Summer Philosophy Day.

Our academics get to know you through our Academic tutor system and small-group teaching. You will meet with your Academic tutor at least once a term, although you are welcome to drop in at any time, and your tutor will aim to support you in pursuing your goals and aspirations.

## Creating memories

You will be warmly welcomed by the philosophy society through a range of social events, from staff vs. student rounders, to study advice sessions, film nights and meals out. The society also produces an undergraduate philosophy journal, *Lateralis*, which you are welcome to get involved in. Join the society to build great friendships and create memories that will last a lifetime.

<sup>1</sup> Subject to availability, see inside back cover.

## Go global

Apply to study abroad as part of your degree, broadening your horizons, enhancing your studies and developing your skill set. You can study abroad for either a term or a year at a university in Europe, the USA, Canada, Japan or Australia.<sup>1</sup>

“There’s a very friendly and inclusive philosophical community at Reading. The good relationships I developed with staff and other students through platforms like the philosophy society really benefited my academic progress, and helped support my professional aspirations.”

**Josh Matthews**  
BA Philosophy graduate



# COURSES

## OUR PHILOSOPHY DEGREES

BA Philosophy

BA Ethics, Value and Philosophy

## OUR JOINT DEGREES

BA Philosophy, Business and Ethics

BA Philosophy, Politics and Economics

BA Philosophy and International Relations

BA Philosophy and Politics

BA Philosophy and English Literature

BA Philosophy and Classical Studies

BA History and Philosophy

BA Psychology and Philosophy

BA Art and Philosophy



# YEAR 1

**Year 1 introduces you to life's big questions and trains you in the methods of rigorous argument.**

Choose from optional modules such as Radical Philosophy challenging our deepest beliefs about society and politics, and The Meaning of Life, asking what makes life worth living.

## Optional modules\*

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Radical Philosophy

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Global Justice

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Philosophical Skills for Life

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The Meaning of Life

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Great Works in Philosophy

# YEAR 2

Year 2 modules focus on enduring philosophical problems. You will develop further analytical skills and trace the development of philosophical ideas through history.

You will have the opportunity to work in depth on key topics in contemporary philosophy and in the history of philosophy, grappling with classic texts and honing your powers of critical thinking.

Ethics, Value and Philosophy students deepen their knowledge of moral philosophy through two compulsory modules, while their other modules are typically taken in philosophy, with the option to take one module from another subject area.

Philosophy, Politics and Economics students can continue pursuing all three subjects, or focus on any two of the three.

## Optional modules\*

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Meaning and the Mind

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Global Philosophies

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Philosophy Through the Ages

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Ethical Argument

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Ignorance, Doubt, and Relativism

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Aesthetics

# YEAR 3

In Year 3, you choose the philosophical topics that you think are exciting and important, and develop your own research skills in much greater depth.

Many of our modules apply the tools of philosophy to the practical problems facing contemporary society, while others explore connections with other academic subjects such as politics, linguistics, and cognitive science. You will be taught in small groups with in-class discussions and one-to-one meetings with your lecturers and seminar leaders.

Guided by your supervisor, you will carry out an independent research project exploring a topic of your choice in either the Dissertation or the Independent learning module.

Ethics, Value and Philosophy students take at least five modules from among a selection in ethics, political philosophy and aesthetics.

Philosophy, Politics and Economics students continue to divide their modules between either two or three subjects.

## Year 3 optional modules\*

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Early Chinese Philosophy

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Current Moral Philosophy

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Fairness

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Business Ethics and Social Responsibility

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Society and State in Ancient Greece

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The Scandal of Film

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Free Will and Responsibility

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Hume and Wittgenstein

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Speech Attacks: Bullshit, Lies, and Propaganda

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Philosophy of Language: animals, babies, colours, and language death

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Paradoxes

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Metaphysics

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God, Time and Freedom

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Philosophy of Religion

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\* These modules run regularly, and are provided as a taster of some of the modules that may be available on these courses.

## Important Information

This brochure was issued in 2023 and is aimed at prospective undergraduate students wishing to apply for a place at the University of Reading (the University) and start a course in autumn 2024. The University makes every effort to ensure that the information provided in the brochure is accurate and up-to-date at the time of going to press (May 2023). However, it may be necessary for the University to make some changes to the information presented in the brochure following publication – for example, where it is necessary to reflect changes in practice or theory in an academic subject as a result of emerging research; or if an accrediting body requires certain course content to be added or removed. To make an informed and up-to-date decision, we recommend that you check [reading.ac.uk/study](http://reading.ac.uk/study) The University undertakes to take all reasonable steps to provide the services (including the courses) described in this brochure. It does not, however, guarantee the provision of such services. Should industrial action or circumstances beyond the control of the University interfere with its ability to provide the services, the University undertakes to use all reasonable steps to minimise any disruption to the services

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### Modules

Sample modules are provided as a taster of some of the modules that may be available on each course. The sample modules listed may be compulsory (core) or optional modules and have been approved in principle for delivery in 2024/25. Please note that as part of our current curriculum improvement process, all modules require final University approval and the University cannot guarantee that a module appearing in this list will definitely run. Teaching staff on specific courses or modules mentioned in this brochure may be subject to change. For the most up to date module information, please check [reading.ac.uk](http://reading.ac.uk)

For optional modules, the University cannot guarantee that all optional modules will be available to all students who may wish to take them, although the University will try to ensure that students are able to take optional modules in which they have expressed interest at the appropriate

time during their course. Optional modules vary from year to year and entry to them will be at the discretion of the Programme Director.

### Joint courses

Our joint courses may have extra requirements, including English language requirements. Please check the individual course pages on our website for further details.

### Year abroad and placement fees

Some courses include an optional or compulsory year abroad or placement year. During this year you will only pay a partial fee which is currently set at 15% of the normal tuition fee. Check the website for the latest information: [reading.ac.uk/fees-and-funding](http://reading.ac.uk/fees-and-funding)

### Placements

Programmes with a Professional Placement Year (also known as 'Year in Industry' or 'Placement Year') are fully dependent on students securing their own placement opportunity, normally through a competitive recruitment process. The University provides dedicated career and application support for placement year students. Students who do not secure a placement or who are unable to complete the placement year due to extenuating circumstances, have the option to transfer to a three year variant of their programme with agreement from their School/Department.

### Study abroad

The partnerships listed are correct at the time of publication (May 2023). For up to date information on the University's partnerships contact [studyabroad@reading.ac.uk](mailto:studyabroad@reading.ac.uk)

Where Study Abroad is not a compulsory part of the degree programme, the University of Reading cannot guarantee that every applicant who applies for the scheme will be successful. Whilst efforts are made to secure sufficient places at partner institutions, the number of places available and the University's partners can vary year-on-year. In all cases, the University cannot guarantee that it will be possible for applicants to choose to study abroad at a particular institution.

Further, certain courses and/or institutions may require you to satisfy specific eligibility criteria. It can be a competitive process. For further information on the University's Study Abroad Scheme please contact [studyabroad@reading.ac.uk](mailto:studyabroad@reading.ac.uk)



## Department of Philosophy

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### Ask us a question

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