Philosophy

The Philosophy degree at Cambridge offers an education in the subject which is both broad and deep. Students can study the central areas of the subject and its history from the Ancient Greeks to the 20th century.

In the first year, there are compulsory courses on metaphysics (the most general speculations about reality), logic (the principles of good reasoning) ethics (the nature and explanation of right and wrong) and on certain classic texts from the history of philosophy. In the second year, metaphysics, epistemology and logic are compulsory, but there are also some optional courses (e.g. political philosophy). In the final year all subjects are optional and students can choose from a wide range of courses (e.g. philosophy of mind, Wittgenstein and European Philosophy from Kant).

Philosophy at Cambridge is taught in the ‘analytic’ tradition, and there is a strong emphasis in the degree programme on argumentative rigour and clarity of thought and expression. The Philosophy Faculty has particular strengths in ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of mind, metaphysics and logic, and logic is a strong component of the undergraduate degree.

Philosophy at Peterhouse

Peterhouse has two philosophy Fellows, Richard Holton and Daisy Dixon. Richard works on moral psychology, ethics, philosophy of language and philosophy of law. Daisy works on the Philosophy, focusing on the nature of artistic meaning. All Peterhouse philosophy students have a one-to-one supervision every week, in addition to attending lectures and seminars, and many of their supervisions will be with Professor Holton. Richard is very happy to discuss studying philosophy at Peterhouse with potential applicants by email.

Students' views

‘In philosophy you tackle some of the most fundamental questions out there: 'What is morally required of us?', 'What is meaning?', even 'What is truth?'. It's tough work but immensely satisfying, and Peterhouse is in my honest opinion the best place to study it at Cambridge. We don’t share our DoS, Richard Holton, with any other college so you get comparatively a lot of individual attention. Most importantly, Richard is a really brilliant teacher - I couldn’t endorse the course here more strongly!’

Adam, Philosophy finalist 2020
Course requirements

We have no preference regarding what subjects candidates may have studied previously at school, whether arts, sciences or a combination of the two, provided it has developed a careful, accurate and analytical approach to thinking. We are solely looking to offer places to young people of high ability.

The application process

We ask all our Philosophy applicants to send us two examples of recent written work. Candidates should expect two interviews along with a short written assessment (lasting not more than an hour) on the day of interview, intended to assess suitability for this subject, and consisting of questions designed to assess use of logic and reasoning. No special preparation or prior knowledge is required. This will be the same assessment across all Colleges and more information can be found on the University website.

Typical conditional offers

Our typical conditional offer for Philosophy is A*AA at A level. IB offers are usually for a minimum of 40-42 points, to include 776 or 777 at Higher Level in relevant subjects. Offers are designed to be realistic, taking into account individual circumstances, and to reflect potential and likely levels of achievement. Most of those who receive offers will attain the grades required.