Master's Degree in Applied Philosophy

Université de Lorraine

This two-year international Master's degree programme, conducted entirely in English, teaches students to apply philosophical rigour to real-world social, political, environmental, economic and scientific problems. It maintains a special focus on the philosophy of AI, climate and environment, and health. Students taking this programme study philosophy at an advanced level, while learning to apply the tools, concepts and arguments of the discipline directly to contemporary issues in these areas of focus and in others. Through mandatory career-preparation courses and the opportunity to undertake work placements for credit, students are prepared for careers in areas such as policymaking, consultancy, public administration, journalism, business, or teaching, as well as for further study.

Course Descriptions

NB Course descriptions are subject to change.

Year M1, Semester 1

Philosophical Foundations (6 ECTS)

To think rigorously about real-world issues, we must draw on fundamental concepts and distinctions that are the subject matter of philosophy – concepts such as those of reason, meaning, value, mind, and democracy, and distinctions such as those between knowledge, truth and opinion, between objectivity and subjectivity, and between the absolute and the relative. This course will equip students to deploy such philosophical tools at an advanced level, as well as giving students mastery of important general theoretical orientations in philosophy, such as realism, reductionism, functionalism, and scepticism.

Methodology for Applied Philosophy (6 ECTS)

Applied philosophy not only deploys the characteristic methodologies of philosophy, such as argument, formal logic, and critical analysis, but also requires understanding of the methodological fundamentals of those domains to which it is applied – for example of elementary statistics, and of different kinds of experimental design. This course will cover both philosophical and empirical methodologies, as well as teaching critical skills for reading and assessing sources, including digital sources and non-philosophical academic sources.

Environment, Economy and Sustainability 1 (6 ECTS)

This course will examine moral, political and economic issues raised by human-caused environmental destruction, climate change and resource depletion. These phenomena cause immense harm that will persist long into the future and may even threaten the survival of humanity. Yet it is unclear what moral, rational, and economic principles should guide our response to them, or could have helped us avoid them in the first place. Topics covered might include climate and environmental justice; individual and collective obligations in the face of global problems; what present generations owe to future generations; the value of nature and biodiversity; and the notion(s) of sustainability.

Applied Philosophy of Science and Technology 1 (6 ECTS)

This course will examine concrete cases of scientific and technological practice through the lens of distinctively philosophical concerns with issues such as the scientific method, scientific objectivity, and scientific knowledge. Possible topics include the use of models in science, the epistemology of science, values in science, the ethics of scientific research, critiques of technology, technology ethics, and transhumanism.

Topics in Applied Philosophy 1 (6 ECTS)

This course will focus on a specific issue or question in applied philosophy, not covered elsewhere in the programme. Possible areas of concentration include applied ethics (including bioethics); applied political philosophy; applied epistemology; applied aesthetics; gender and feminism; philosophy of economics; applied metaphysics; philosophy of social science; applied philosophy of language; philosophy of psychiatry; and philosophy of law.

Year M1, Semester 2

Philosophy of AI 1 (6 ECTS)

The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence systems with capacities that resemble, and in some respects exceed, those of humans, raises profound questions of immense practical significance. Addressing them requires an understanding of how these systems work. This course will provide such an understanding, in order to then address some of the moral and practical questions they raise. These might include: Do AI systems such as LLMs *think*? Are they agents? Might they be conscious? Could we have moral obligations towards them? Can we have personal relationships with them? What principles should govern our creation and use of them? What is the significance of our limited ability to explain, predict and control their behaviour?

Health, Medicine and Welfare 1 (6 ECTS)

Health is widely held to be a key component of human welfare. It is, accordingly, one of the foremost concerns of many individuals, and of public policy; we make enormous individual and collective sacrifices in order to preserve and promote health. Yet it is a matter of dispute what health consists in and what exactly its value is. It is therefore unclear to what extent, and on what grounds, such sacrifices are justified. This course will critically examine the variety of concepts of health and their operation in various contexts – historical, medical, pharmacological, and that of public policy – and it will apply the understanding gained to real-world problems in health, medicine and policy.

Truth and Politics (6 ECTS)

This course will bring to bear the tools of political philosophy, ethics, and philosophy of language, on our current age of political destabilisation and informational disorder. It is often claimed that liberal democracy and the rule of law are threatened by forces of populism and tyranny. It is also claimed that we live in a 'post-truth' era, in which the roles of trust and truth-telling in public speech have been undermined. What do such claims amount to? To what extent are they true? If they are, what can or should be done about it?

Individual project/work placement (9 ECTS)

In this course students will conduct a supervised individual research project on a specific topic in applied philosophy, producing a mini-dissertation which they will defend orally. Each student will be assigned a supervisor who will guide and approve their choice of topic. The course will enable students to pursue in depth a specific issue that fits their interests, and will provide valuable experience of independent individual research in advance of the more substantial dissertation project in year 2. Optionally, students may undertake a work placement in a relevant professional setting, and their dissertation may incorporate or take the form of a substantive philosophical reflection on their placement.

Careers for Philosophers 1 (3 ECTS)

In this course students will identify possible avenues for careers, advancement or further study after the end of their Masters studies, drawing on real-world case studies of the career trajectories of philosophy graduates. They will conduct an audit of their own skills and knowledge. The course will foster an awareness of the transferable skills and knowledge acquired during the degree programme, and will cover practical skills such as writing a CV, a letter of motivation, and a project proposal.

Year M2, Semester 1

Dissertation/work placement preparation (9 ECTS)

This course will prepare students for the dissertation/work placement course in semester 2. Under individual supervision, students will identify their dissertation topic (and their work placement if they choose to incorporate this). They will construct a bibliography, write a critical literature summary, and write a provisional plan for their dissertation.

Careers for Philosophers 2 (3 ECTS)

This course will continue the reflection, skill-acquisition, and career preparation undertaken in Careers for Philosophers 1. Students will now be required to take concrete steps towards their chosen career path. This may include, for instance, attending conferences or relevant professional events, contacting prospective employers or institutions, and writing proposals. Students will report on the steps undertaken, on what they have learned or accomplished, and on their planned next steps.

Environment, Economy and Sustainability 2 (6 ECTS)

This course will develop and expand the study of environment, economy and sustainability begun in the corresponding course in Year 1 Semester 1. See the description of that course for details of possible topics.

Applied Philosophy of Science and Technology 2 (6 ECTS)

This course will develop and expand the study of science and technology begun in the corresponding course in Year 1 Semester 1. See the description of that course for details of possible topics.

Topics in Applied Philosophy 2 (6 ECTS)

This course will focus on a specific issue or question in applied philosophy, not covered elsewhere in the programme, and distinct from that covered the previous year in the corresponding Year 1 course. See the description of that course for possible areas of concentration.

Year M2, Semester 2

Philosophy of AI 2 (6 ECTS)

This course will develop and expand the study of the Philosophy of AI begun in the corresponding course in Year 1 Semester 2. See the description of that course for details of possible topics.

Health, Medicine and Welfare 2 (6 ECTS)

This course will develop and expand the study of health, medicine and welfare begun in the corresponding course in Year 1 Semester 2. See the description of that course for details of possible topics.

Dissertation (18 ECTS)

Under individual supervision, students will produce a written Master's dissertation on the topic chosen in semester 1, and they will defend their dissertation orally. Optionally, the dissertation may incorporate or take the form of a philosophical reflection on their work placement.