

2021



MINDS UNDERGROUND™ PHILOSOPHY SUMMER SCHOOL



Overview

Our Virtual Summer Series aim to widen your knowledge over the summer period, under the expert guidance of our team of Oxbridge graduates, giving you the opportunity to acquire or develop skills and expertise relevant to your subject interests, in preparation for future university entrance, including personal statement writing and potential interviews.

What to Expect

Each class is hosted by a specialist in the field, with an emphasis placed on deepening subject knowledge and inspiring you in your independent preparation. Come armed with questions, notebooks, a readiness to engage in critical discussion and ensure you keep a file with notes on each session to refer back to when it comes to applications.

Logistical Details

All classes will take place over Microsoft Teams. Teams invites and links will be sent out prior to the Summer School commencing.

Mentors will set some pre-reading/ research prior to sessions, and optional tasks between classes. Post-session reading lists will be issued for you to engage in further independent exploration where applicable.

Dates: Classes will be held every Friday, 5.30-6.30pm UK time over a 12-week period:
Friday 25th June - Friday 10th September



2021 Summer School

Our Hosts

Hazel and Sarah will both be hosting 6 classes of the Summer School. Hazel's classes are centred on Philosophy of Mind and Artificial Intelligence, whilst Sarah provides an insight into Early Modern Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion.



Sarah

Sarah graduated from Oxford with a First in PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics), topping the year in Philosophy. She was the recipient of multiple academic awards including the Hertford College Prize for Philosophy and the Prize for Politics in 2019, as well as the Hashomer Hatzair scholarship to participate in educational projects in Israel-Palestine in 2020. This year, Sarah is studying for a Master's in Philosophy at New York University, for which she achieved a full academic scholarship. Sarah currently specialises in early modern philosophy, social epistemology, political theory and feminist philosophy.



Hazel

Hazel graduated from the University of Oxford in Philosophy and Theology and is currently reading for her MPhil at Oxford this year. Hazel is fascinated by the humanities - taking her passion for Philosophy as a starting point, she is also interested in Ancient History, Theology, Anthropology and English Literature.



The Agenda: Sarah



The Ontological Argument

Ontological arguments attempt to establish the existence of God a priori, relying on claims we can know by reason alone. For example, Descartes' ontological argument can be represented as: "God is by definition a being that possesses all perfections. Existence is a perfection. Therefore God has the property of existence — God exists". Arguments of this kind have attracted a lot of attention because, despite their aura of trickery, they are strangely difficult to unpick. Here, we will examine various styles of ontological arguments (from Descartes, Anselm and Plantinga) and see whether any of them succeed in establishing the existence of God through reason alone.



Miracles

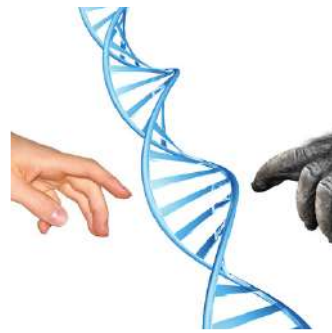
Instead of appealing to deductive arguments, many theists point to aspects of their experience when justifying their belief in God: perhaps they see signs of intelligent design in the cosmos, a feeling of spiritual connection to the divine, or claim to have witnessed a miracle. Hume argued that even though they are not metaphysically impossibilities, it can never be rational to believe that a miracle has occurred, and so miracles are not good grounds for religious belief. In this session, we will explore Hume's maxim, and decide whether we think his argument generates too much scepticism.



If There is a God, Does God Exist in Time?

According to theism, God is an eternal being. There are two ways to cash out this notion of eternity. Either God is an eternal being that exists outside of time, or God is eternal and exists within time, at every moment of time. Atheists argue that inconsistencies in God's nature arise by positing him as either temporal or atemporal, and that therefore God cannot exist. How might the theist resist this claim? Here, we will try and reconcile God's relationship with time, demonstrating that if God exists, it is far more plausible that he exists within time. →

The Agenda: Sarah



Can Evolutionary Arguments Be Used to Debunk the Existence of God?

Debunking arguments maintain that the suspicious origins of a belief are enough to undermine it. Atheists have argued that humans have the capacity to believe in God because of evolution via natural selection: it would have been advantageous for our hominin ancestors to believe in some higher power because of the benefits this capacity conveyed in terms of social cohesion and cooperation. Because natural selection tracks what's useful for survival, rather than what is really out there, the evolutionary origin of our capacity to believe in God uniformly undermines religious beliefs. But is this enough to undermine the justification for believing in God? To determine whether it is, we will explore whether evolution really produces these off-track biases.



Early Modern Philosophy — Descartes' Method of Doubt

Descartes' *Meditations* begins with the meditator declaring that he will abandon any beliefs which he has even the smallest reason to doubt. The result of this is to make it impossible for the meditator to have any further doubts about what is subsequently discovered, since what he derives after abandoning all his doubtful beliefs must be completely certain and indubitable. Whilst this method is intuitively appealing in it promises to deliver truth and certainty, it is ultimately flawed as a philosophical method. Here, we will explore why Descartes' brand of scepticism is impossible to achieve, and therefore cannot deliver what he intended.



Early Modern Philosophy — The Problem of Induction

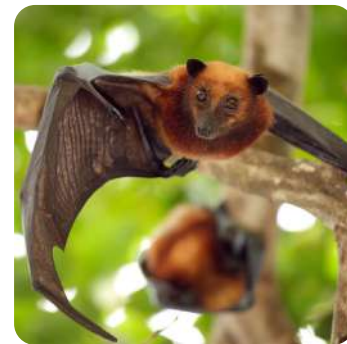
The term 'induction' is used to refer to inferences that are made from the past to the future, or from the observed to the unobserved. We all use inductive inferences in our everyday lives: we assume that the sun will continue to rise every morning, that gravity will remain constant, that we should avoid putting our hands directly in burning flames, and so on. Hume's insight in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, however, demonstrates that there is no rational basis for believing that the future will resemble the past. But how can we go on doing science, philosophy, or even living our everyday lives if we are not justified in believing that the laws of nature will remain constant? →

The Agenda: Hazel



Substance and Property Dualism – Is My Mind a Mental Thing or a Mental Property?

This introduces us to the crux of philosophy of mind – what is the mind? We start by acquainting ourselves with the two main forms of ‘dualism’ – substance dualism and property dualism – to assess how strong the arguments for the mind being separate to the body really are. Along the way, we encounter questions that relate to our overall conclusion: what is consciousness? Am I a philosophical zombie? Does ‘red’ mean the same for you and me?



The Problem of Qualia – What Is It Like To Be a Bat?

Here we address one of the central topics in the Philosophy of Mind debate – qualia. Qualia are our individual subjective experiences of the world: the taste of tea, the pinkness of sunset, the pain of a headache, the feeling of sand in my toes etc. Here we look at how important these are for our understanding of our own existence – how important is it that pain has a certain sensation? What about cases of ‘phantom leg’? How do we know qualia is genuinely meaningful?



Materialist Theories (I) – Behaviourism

Here we move onto the other side of the debate – the mind is not separate from the body – but then how do we define the mind? This theory looks at the mind as equivalent to ‘behavioural states’. Here we look at two alternative theories: hard and soft behaviourism and ask ourselves: how plausible is it that the mind is just a physical thing? Do my thoughts just correlate to my behaviour? What problems might these theories raise for mental health conditions/disabilities/young children?



The Agenda: Hazel



Materialist Theories (II) – Mind Brain Identity Theory

Now we move onto another materialist theory, which is founded on an ontological reduction. We examine some of history's famous ontological reductions: light and EM radiation, heat and the vibration of particles, the evening star and the morning star. Is the mind really just the brain? How does it feel to say 'love' or 'friendship' or 'happiness' or 'determination' are just chemical equations in the brain? Is this a satisfying solution?



Materialist Theories (III) – Functionalism – Robots and Philosophy

Born from Alan Turing's 'The Imitation Game', this theory holds that the mind is a function of a fully working brain. We assess this theory in relation to those we have studied before, and assess its weaknesses. We also approach the following questions: Are we just machines? What really differentiates us from robots? Can any of us have an 'original idea' anyway? In order to look at these questions, we will look at the Turing Test, and the Chinese Room thought experiments.



The Problem of Other Minds and the Threat of Solipsism

Here we assess one of philosophy's biggest questions – how do I know that other people exist? In light of our discussion on what a 'mind' is, we will have many things to consider on account of knowing or proving 'other minds'. How do substance dualist theories struggle with the threat of solipsism? Can I create a language by myself? Could I really be a brain in a vat?




Any questions? Get in touch!



Contact Us

Phone Number

 +447772211241

Email Address

 enquiries@mindsunderground.com

Website

 www.mindsunderground.com