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Philosophy

SYLLABUS OVERVIEW
16-18 YEARS OLDS

immerse
EDUCATION

About Immerse

Immerse Education is an award-winning academic summer school provider offering programmes for 16-18 year olds in centres of academic prestige.

The aim of these programmes is to provide participants with academically challenging content that develops their understanding of and passion for their chosen discipline. Through 40 hours of academic sessions, the programmes also offer young students unique and valuable insights into what it would be like to study their chosen subject at university.



This Syllabus Overview provides a summary of the topics and subject areas that participants can encounter during their studies with Immerse. It has been carefully created by our expert tutors who are current members of world-leading universities, and who have experience in teaching undergraduate students.

Academic Sessions

The academic sessions at Immerse are arranged into modules to enable participants to explore a broad range of topics over the course of two weeks. The modules included in this syllabus overview are indicative but not prescriptive.

Tutors are encouraged to include their own specialisms and also focus on any particular areas of interest expressed by participants within the class. They may choose to provide further detail on a specific topic, or they may include new material and information that builds on the knowledge already developed during the programme.

Personal Project

Each programme includes an element of individual work, generally termed the 'Personal Project'. This can take many forms but is commonly an essay or presentation delivered on the final day of the programme. Participants will receive feedback on this work which may also be mentioned in the participant evaluation which is provided in writing by the tutor once the programmes have ended.





Preparatory work

Some tutors may ask participants to complete some preparatory work, such as reading or a series of exercises in advance of the programme. Participants are strongly encouraged to complete this work since it will be included in the opening sessions of the programme. Any preparatory tasks will be provided in advance of the programme directly to the participant.

Academic Difficulty

As all of our programmes are designed to provide a unique introduction to advanced material, the syllabus will be academically challenging at times.

This is something to be excited about and all of our tutors will encourage and support participants throughout the programme. Immerse Education aims to develop every participant regardless of ability, and our tutors will adapt their teaching to individual needs.

Aim of the Philosophy Programme

The Immerse Education Philosophy programme is designed to build upon the foundation of critical analysis skills that participants have already gained in a traditional classroom environment and highlight how this can be used to inspire further study at university. Participants are encouraged to explore new material in-depth and to form independent and considered opinions and ideas based on sound research and analysis of others' ideas. By the end of the programme, participants will have a good understanding, not only of university-level content, but also the variety of degree programmes available in subjects related to philosophy. Beyond this, participants will also explore the career opportunities available to graduates in this field.



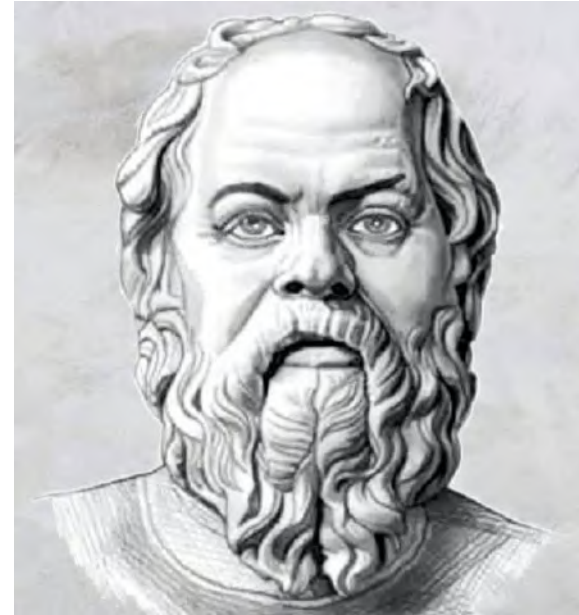
TOPICS LIST

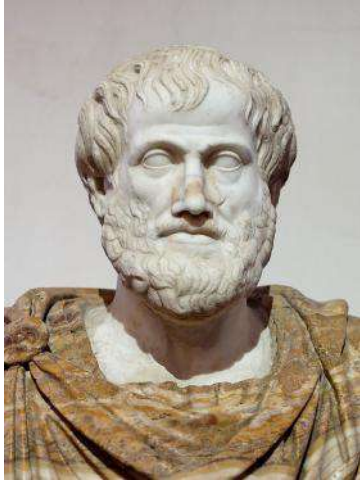
Origins: The Presocratic

The Presocratics aimed to deduce the first principles of nature from their sensory experience of the world. Instead of putting imaginary entities like gods in command of the world, they claimed that everything that exists comes from water (Thales, c. 624 – 546 BCE), or air (Anaximenes, c. 585 – 528), or fire (Heraclitus c. 535 – 475), or the four elements (Empedocles c. 490 – c. 430). We will examine these various explanations of the natural world, and ask: Are they convincing? How do the questions raised by the Presocratics relate to current scientific and philosophical debates?

The Good Life: Socrates and Plato

Unlike the Presocratics, Socrates (470/469 – 399 BCE) was not interested in the physical world surrounding us. His concern was human nature: What is our soul? How should we care for it in order to be both virtuous and happy? Although Socrates himself did not propose any positive answer of his own, Plato (c. 424 – 348), his pupil, did. In particular, he gave a famous definition of justice in his major work, the *Republic*. Plato needed to claim that such abstract things as 'justice' or 'goodness' actually exist, although they cannot be grasped by the senses. In so doing, Plato devised the very notion of an 'idea': he invented abstraction.





Knowing the World: Aristotle

Aristotle was concerned with understanding everything that exists in this world, including — and most primarily — the concrete particular objects or living beings that we can touch and see. By putting observation and experimentation at the roots of any learning process, Aristotle inaugurated the methods of modern science; and his all-encompassing exploration of the world laid down the foundations of the main branches of knowledge still studied in modern universities: logic, metaphysics, physics, ethics, anatomy, psychology, poetics, and so on. We will first have a look at Aristotle's view of reality — or substance — as presented in his first logical work (the *Categories*), and examine his theories of the four causes in the *Physics*.



The Human Condition: Montaigne

Unlike many philosophers of the Middle Ages, Michel de Montaigne (1533 – 1592) could certainly not be accused of following slavishly the views of his predecessors. Although he had thoroughly read the ancient philosophers, he loved to deride them, like an impudent student, by pointing to the extravagance of their claims or their inability to reach common agreement. What credence could we give to conflicting theories? What then can we really know? Montaigne claimed that the only thing we can know for sure is our own human nature. What advice can Montaigne give us about how to find happiness?

'I think therefore I am': Descartes

René Descartes (1596 – 1650) adopted and radicalised Montaigne's doubts on the limitations of human knowledge: erasing from his mind any thought he was unable to demonstrate rigorously, he went so far as to doubt the existence of his own body, and kept only one certitude: while he is doubting, Descartes cannot doubt that he is actually doubting, namely, that he is thinking. From this certitude ('I am thinking') Descartes managed to re-establish through logical reasoning his previous certitudes about the existence of himself ('I think, therefore I am'), of the surrounding world, and even of God. But what is the point of restating what was initially put in doubt?

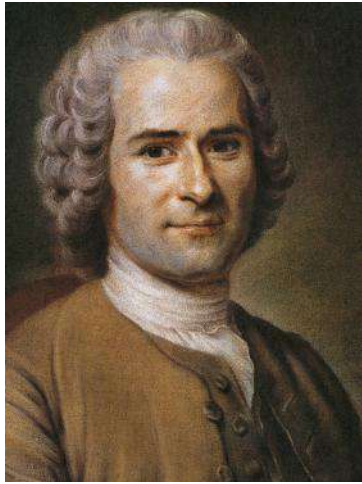


The Enlightenment: Kant

Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) belonged to that group of thinkers who believed that the existence of God cannot be rationally demonstrated. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant distinguished the capacities of perception and understanding, and showed that any knowledge should rely on both capacities. This set the field of philosophy on a new footing, explaining human perception and cognition, while at the same time throwing out the speculations of the metaphysicians who, from Plato onwards, busied themselves with imperceptible entities such as the soul or God. We will try to understand how such a view of human mind radically transformed our approach to the world — Kant's so-called Copernican revolution.

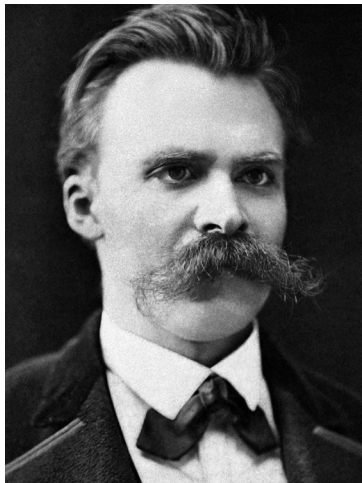


TOPICS LIST



Liberty and Equality: Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778) was another major figure of the Enlightenment. He proclaimed: ‘Men are born and remain free and equal in rights’ in the *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1754), and *The Social Contract* (1762). We will have a closer look at the *Discourse* which, far from being merely a political treatise, proves to be a thorough reflection on the origins of society and on the very definition of human nature. We will see how this text challenges the view that society and civilisation are a necessary condition for people to be virtuous and happy.



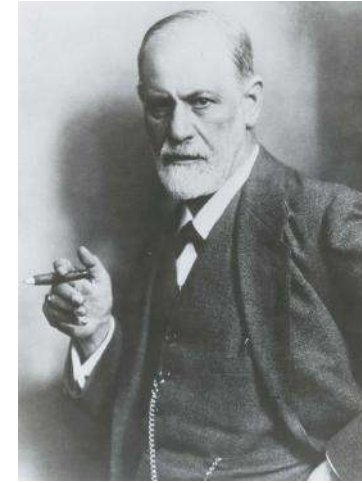
Beyond Truth and Morality: Nietzsche

For Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900), humanity is anything but innocent. What fundamentally drives us is our ‘Will to Power’, our desire to dominate, even to enslave our fellow men. Philosophers are not exempt from this harsh analysis. Under the pretence of teaching what is ‘true’ and what is ‘good’, their unconscious aim is to subordinate their pupils and their audience. Accordingly, our notions of ‘true and false’, or ‘good and bad’ are nothing else but the views invented and imposed by the powerful in order to exert and maintain their power on the weak.

TOPICS LIST

The Unconscious: Freud

Freud further explored one of Nietzsche's major insights: most of our actions and thoughts are motivated by unconscious plans and desires. Trained as a physician, Freud brought to prominence the idea of the 'unconscious' by using the observational methods of modern psychology. Thus, he invented a new science, psychoanalysis, which aimed at exploring and curing psychological traumas, using a 'talking cure'. We will explore the various ways by which the psychoanalyst claims to access the unconscious (dream analysis, verbal slips, etc.), as well as the tripartite structure that Freud recognised in this submerged area of the mind (id - ego - superego), comparable in a way to Plato's tripartite view of the soul.



Freedom: Sartre

'Are we free?' became a burning issue in the subsequent years of the 20th century. It was most famously posed by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 – 1980) and the so-called existentialists. Sartre opposed Freud as he took human freedom to be absolute. Unlike the world of objective things, which is ruled by predictable laws, men are radically free, and being free is the most basic feature of their condition. However, such a view has a major drawback: If we are totally free, do we have meaning, or essence? Whereas scientific laws give meaning to the things in the world, human actions, if totally free, may appear deprived of any fixed ground.



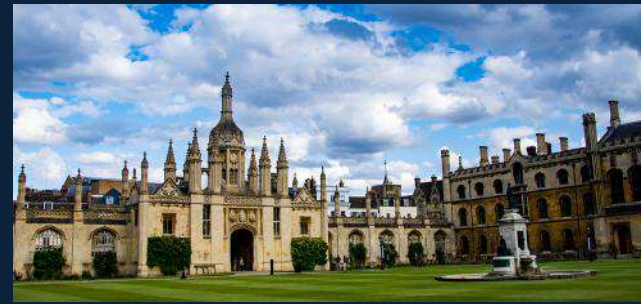
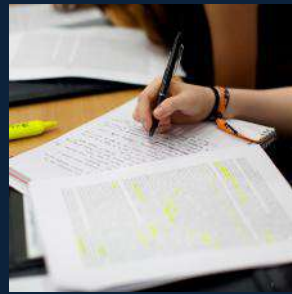


Personal Project

Throughout the fortnight, participants will be working on their own personal project. Having been provided with a brief, participants should research and prepare a presentation for their peers. This will build upon the theory that they have learnt over the course of the programme and is also an opportunity to showcase their ability to apply this to concrete examples. Presentations are followed by questions from the audience and wider class discussion of particular points of interest. The tutor may also include feedback about the presentation in the written evaluation which is sent to participants after the programme has ended.

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