



Philosophy

Critical thinking for a complex world

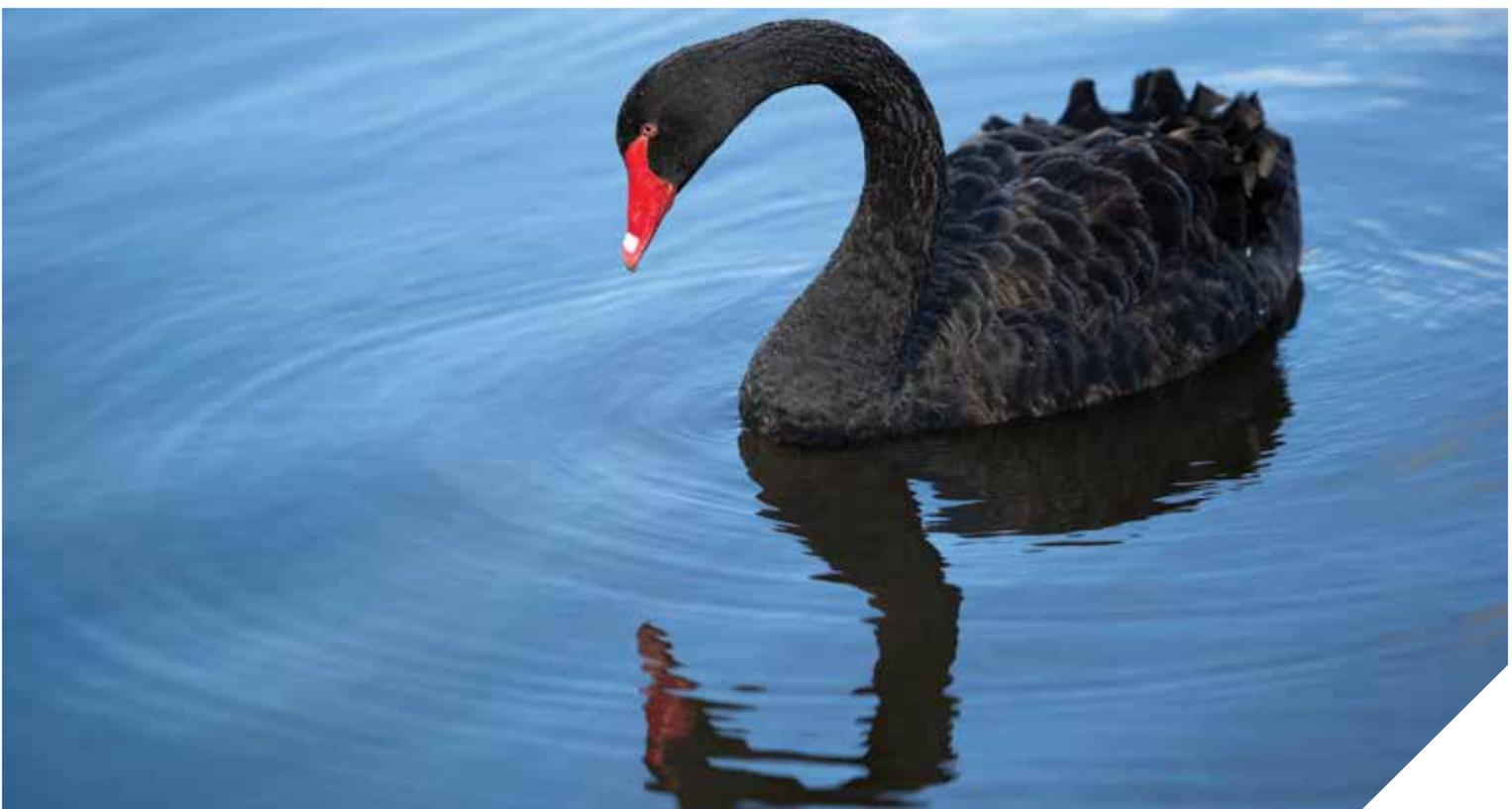
“Philosophy is a way of learning to think better, to reason your way through problems, and to question things in a systematic way. These skills are among the most important you will ever learn, at least as important as reading and writing.”

Rohan Murphy
Policy Analyst, Strategic Policy on Ethics & Innovation, Ministry of Health

There is no limit to the issues to which philosophers apply their reason: from knowledge (Are scientific claims certain?), to language (What is meaning?), from ethical and social problems (How should we run the country?), to metaphysical issues (Is the future less real than the past?).

The skills and knowledge you gain from studying philosophy will make you a better student in other subjects; they will also be invaluable in a wide variety of occupations because Philosophy focuses less on what you believe and more on the quality of your reasons for believing it. By examining the reasons we have for the claims we make, philosophy develops your powers of argument, analysis, and critical reasoning. It will help you to express yourself more clearly and give you the abilities required to address complex and difficult problems.

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Why study Philosophy?

Philosophy provides a tool kit to critically engage with difficult and important questions. It seems that some actions are right and others are wrong but it is difficult to explain if this is because one produces better outcomes or the other respects humanity. It seems that some scientific claims are almost certainly true, but a crucial element of the success of science is its willingness to revise its claims in light of new evidence. It seems that there is little more to our brains than complex neural networks but how do these networks generate intense feelings?

Discussing these abstract problems develops the philosophical tools necessary to deal with practical problems, such as whether an unpopular theory should be accepted, or to what extent we can appeal to common sense when arguing about a radical claim. In grappling with these issues philosophers seek to build a well-grounded picture of the world and of human life. The key skill for a philosopher is the ability to construct and dissect arguments, so a central part of all philosophy is training in clear and effective reasoning.

The Core philosophical disciplines focus on the nature of reasoning, knowledge and existence. But philosophical issues arise in many disciplines and professions (including law, medicine, business and science, among others).

What do students who've taken Philosophy say?

"The most interesting thing I've learned about in my life. Wish someone had told me about it when I first got to Uni."

"My philosophy degree gave me an edge over other [job] applicants. It also served me well as a social worker and an English teacher before becoming a lawyer."

"My philosophy degree allows me to look at the world in a meaningful way and provides me the tools to make sense of complex situations."

"Critical thinking skills are very marketable in my profession. My phil degree is a point of reference that evidences those skills, and has helped me differentiate my application from other grads."

Philosophy at Otago

The Philosophy Department at Otago University has an outstanding reputation for research, in a country known internationally for its strength in philosophy. In the 2012 New Zealand Performance Based Research Fund Quality Evaluation, we were the highest scoring philosophy department in the country, and the second highest department in any discipline. Our research strengths include metaphysics, epistemology, ethical theory, philosophy of science, philosophical logic, early modern philosophy, philosophy of language and mind.

The Department has a friendly and open atmosphere in which staff and postgraduate students regularly socialise. We are an active community – we have a steady stream of visitors from overseas to our weekly seminar programme, so that students have the chance to meet and hear papers by a wide range of leading philosophers. Our undergraduate Philosophy Club meets monthly for pizza and philosophical discussion.

Studying Philosophy

Philosophy can be studied at all levels (BA, BA Hons, MA and, PhD). It may be taken either as a major or a minor in a BA. Some philosophy papers can be taken as science subjects and Critical Thinking (PHIL 105) may be taken as a Humanities, Science or Commerce course. Many students choose to add philosophy to their skill set by doing a double major or double degree such as BA/LLB, BA/BSc or BA/BCom. Philosophy forms part of the interdisciplinary PPE (Philosophy, Politics and Economics) Arts major. It also may be taken as part of a new degree, the Bachelor of Arts and Science (BASc), which provides the competitive advantage of a double degree in arts and science in a much shorter time frame.

Background required

No previous acquaintance with philosophy is needed to take any of our 100-level papers, or many of our 200-level papers.

What would my career prospects be?

Some of our students go on to successful careers as professional philosophers, but for most of our students, it's not about getting a career in philosophy, it's about getting some philosophy into their careers.

- Many surveys of salary by degree only look at salary after a few years of graduation, which can be misleading. A survey of 1.2 million degree holders by PayScale, Inc., cited in the *Wall Street Journal*, shows that Philosophy majors increase their starting salary by 103.5% after 10 years, an equal best with mathematics among all majors. The overall mid career salary for a philosophy major at the 75th percentile is 127,000 U.S. dollars, 9th among all 50 majors surveyed.

Find the survey by searching 'Degrees_that_Pay_you_Back'

- Philosophy gives you a unique mix of analytical and literary skills that are highly sought after by employers whether you are pursuing a career in academia or elsewhere.
- A recent destinations survey showed that our graduates live in cities across the world such as Vienna, London, Frankfurt, Vancouver, Berlin, Singapore, New Orleans, and all over New Zealand and Australia. See the placements of some of our recent students at otago.ac.nz/philosophy-placements
- Philosophers find work in a huge variety of careers, including:

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| Law | Publishing |
| Medicine | Journalism |
| Politics | Acting |
| Economics | Documentary film making |
| Science | Social services |
| E-commerce | Systems analysis |
| Diplomacy | Sport |
| Software Design | Teaching |
| Computing | Nature conservation |
| Dispute resolution | |

Why is the black swan important for philosophers?

PROFILE

Lucy Harris Philosophy (Hons), LLB (Hons) Solicitor, Simpson Grierson (Employment Law team)

Lucy Harris took a philosophy paper in her first year because it seemed different to anything that she'd taken at high school, and it looked interesting. It turned out to be a great fit.

"I really enjoyed the kind of deep and critical thinking philosophy involved; and being introduced to a new way of reasoning about things using logic. I'd never really thought in such a structured way before."

This "whole new way of thinking" helped her with her study of law, and continues to help her in her current position as a solicitor at Simpson Grierson.

"Philosophy is relevant to many subjects. In law, it can help you think about things past the point where law stops. For a lot of issues like emerging technology, genetics, euthanasia, the treatment of criminals, the law can only really take us so far. Philosophy helps us to think about what the law should be and what's wrong with it."

"I think philosophy in particular is very good at teaching you succinct writing skills, which is important for a lawyer. Also, as a lawyer, when you get a real-world situation with a bunch of facts and multiple sides of the story, philosophy is really good at helping you to cut through the fluff to see the real issue."

Lucy found the Department of Philosophy to be very friendly and welcoming, and really appreciated the breadth that the arts degree added to her studies.

"The flexibility of the arts degree was awesome in terms of being able to add papers from outside your major. I got a taste of linguistics, politics, anthropology, psychology, all sorts of different things, and that definitely added to my general knowledge."

Lucy's advice – "Just immerse yourself in it and you'll get back what you put in."



For questions about
Philosophy
otago.ac.nz/philosophy