



# Philosophy Rapuka Whakaaro

“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

## Critical thinking for a complex world

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 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.

0800 80 80 98 | [otago.ac.nz](http://otago.ac.nz) | [university@otago.ac.nz](mailto:university@otago.ac.nz)



## Why study Philosophy?

Philosophy provides a toolkit to critically engage with difficult and important questions. It seems that some actions are right and others are wrong, but it's 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 – 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 Philosophy degree is

a point of reference that evidences those skills, and has helped me differentiate my application from other graduates."

## Philosophy at Otago

The Philosophy programme at Otago has an outstanding reputation for research, in a country known internationally for its strength in philosophy. Our research specialisations include metaphysics, epistemology, ethical theory, philosophy of science, philosophical logic, early modern philosophy, philosophy of artificial intelligence, and the philosophy of language and mind.

The Philosophy programme has a friendly and open atmosphere in which staff and postgraduate students regularly socialise. We are an active community – a steady stream of visitors from across New Zealand and from overseas attend our weekly seminar programme, providing students with the opportunity to meet and attend seminars given by a wide range of leading philosophers. Our undergraduate Philosophy Club meets monthly for pizza and philosophical discussion.

## Studying Philosophy

Philosophy can be studied either as a major or a minor in a Bachelor of Arts (BA). Some Philosophy papers can be taken as Science subjects and Critical Thinking (PHIL 105) may be taken as part of 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 the Bachelor of Arts and Science (BASc), which provides the competitive advantage of a double degree in arts and science in a 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 since 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 per cent after 10 years, an equal best with mathematics among all majors. 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 here:

[otago.ac.nz/philosophy-placements](https://otago.ac.nz/philosophy-placements)

Philosophers find work in a huge variety of careers, including law, medicine, politics, economics, science, e-commerce, diplomacy, software design, computing, dispute resolution, publishing, journalism, acting, documentary film-making, social services, systems analysis, sport, teaching, and nature conservation.

## Philosophical question

Why is the black swan important for philosophers?

For questions about  
Philosophy  
[otago.ac.nz/philosophy](https://otago.ac.nz/philosophy)



## PROFILE

### Angus Pauley

Bachelor of Arts (Major: Psychology, Minor: Philosophy)  
Programme Facilitator, Startup Dunedin

"One of the best pieces of advice I received was that it doesn't matter what you study as long as it's something you are genuinely interested in – then you'll do well. Taking that advice, I settled on a BA as it allowed me to study the highest number of papers I was genuinely interested in – these happened to be Psychology and Philosophy.

"I can't name a Philosophy paper that I didn't enjoy. Philosophy challenges you to think – it isn't about memorisation of facts or regurgitating learned responses, it's about assessing different arguments, creating the best possible case for an opposing view, and then making an argument for the view you support while also acknowledging its weaknesses. Studying Philosophy made me a much better decision-maker and team player.

"I am the Programme Facilitator at Startup Dunedin. I'm responsible for the design, organisation and delivery of each Startup Dunedin programme. I meet directly with founders of Dunedin-based start-ups at a variety of stages to understand their needs and connect them with the right resources, tools, or people to help them achieve their next steps.

"Developing my critical thinking skills during my Philosophy studies prepared me incredibly well for my job – they allow me to objectively assess information and situations without getting caught too often by my own biases, and to make better decisions and think strategically."

