

CHARTER FOR THE MAJOR IN POLITICAL HUMANITIES

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Political humanities refers to a multidisciplinary field of study that draws upon a cross-fertilisation of critical perspectives to forge an understanding of politics in all its forms. By putting human experience back at the centre of intellectual inquiry, this major is designed to guide students towards the acquisition of a percipient understanding of the complexity of political thought and action. The major will especially study the rules of living together, the poles of sovereignty and the preservation of freedoms.

The Political Humanities major will provide students with the critical tools and intellectual sources necessary to understanding the political, economic and social issues of our time. Through academic inquiry, engaging with issues and identifying paradoxes, students will acquire the keys to understanding the contemporary world, thus preparing them to act in that world, nourishing their capacity for political thought and action.

The major will favour a decompartmentalized approach to the knowledge acquired in the humanities and social sciences. Drawing on the wealth of knowledge in the humanities that constitutes our common heritage, students will explore the centres of meaning put forth by philosophy, history, the arts and literature, law, anthropology and sociology. This will call into question the given facts and habitual categorisations of knowledge, thus encouraging students to develop their own processes of critical thought and intellectual inquiry.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The Political Humanities major is designed to enable students:

- To forge a political culture that draws upon the humanities (literary, philosophical, scientific, and digital) by engaging with primary and secondary sources that the students will be expected to carefully decipher and assimilate.
- To develop a capacity for critical thought based on an awareness of the historical character and long-term nature of social and political events; the relevance of comparing national or international contexts; and the fruitfulness of a methodological pluralism that involves mastering different critical approaches.
- To acquire the capacity to deconstruct discourse by taking a step back from current events, enriching intellectual inquiry with questions drawn from the different fields of knowledge and the history of thought.

- To construct personal, critical and reasoned arguments by studying and practising the art of rhetoric.

ACADEMIC FORMATS

The Political Humanities major is taught in the second year, and comprises two types of content:

- **Core courses**, designed for all students of the major, addressing fundamental areas of inquiry in the major,
- **Methodological workshops**, in small groups, aimed at advancing students' technical capacity to engage with issues relating to the major.

These courses are supplemented by seminar courses, one during the autumn semester and three during the spring semester.

Core courses

The core courses in the Political Humanities major consist of:

- An **advanced political philosophy course** (Fall semester), 48 hours
- An **advanced history course** (Fall semester), 48 hours
- A **multidisciplinary course** (Fall semester), 24 hours.

Advanced political philosophy course (24 hours of lectures + 24 hours of discussion sections - 6 ECTS credits): The ABCs of Politics: Theoretical and Practical Perspectives on Contemporary Politics

This course is inspired by *l'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze* ("Gilles Deleuze's alphabet book") with a series of 12 letters for 12 sessions (for example, A for Authority, B for Behaviour, C for Consent, E for Equity, F for Freedom).

The course has three main aims:

1) To facilitate learning in the field of political philosophy. The course outlines the main political concepts and doctrines; it presents the different styles of philosophical reasoning; it fleshes out their utility for society. As an advanced course within the major, the initial task of the course is to familiarise students with the philosophical language, the requirements, history and different approaches of the discipline. In order to be able to formulate an argument in an informed way and express legitimate disagreements using a common vocabulary, it is essential to master a certain number of tools and approaches. It is also necessary to be able to situate oneself within a philosophical and moral universe that is based on hidden tradition: many ideas that seem innovative or even revolutionary to us today were developed by the thinkers (philosophers, writers, and artists) of the past, with other words, and in other forms.

2) So as not to restrict learners to purely abstract reasoning, students are then encouraged to reflect on the links between theory and practice. These links will rely on a set of classical categories, the discussion is guided through several contemporary political, social and moral topics. The aim is to identify the

reappropriation or reformulation of these classical categories, to reflect on the dialogue between a formal understanding of political phenomena and the ways in which they are widely understood, implemented or contested by individuals and groups. Additionally, the course will show that philosophical concepts are inspired by and have an impact on political and social realities.

3) Debates and controversies. Political philosophy, as we understand it, sustains an intimate relationship with the political, social and moral challenges of the contemporary world, whether through its implicit or explicit ethos. The 'political ABCs' are therefore not only, nor mainly, a set of concepts useful for understanding the history of philosophy; the course also offers an opportunity to reflect on how ideas are translated into reality, how they affect reality and how reality nourishes and contributes to political thought. Each entry - each letter - is thus a pretext to reflect on specific challenges and concrete situations. In short, we will examine difficult cases where the debates and controversies are made intelligible by their inclusion in competing philosophical approaches.

Advanced history course (24 hours of lectures + 24 hours of discussion sections - 6 ECTS credits) Narratives and Representations of the Past

The objective of this course is to engage students in a reflection on representations and uses of the past. Exploring the evolution of the work of historians - historiography - is but one component of this course, such is the importance of reflecting upon and taking into account the past through works of literary and visual fiction - novels, theatre, films, comic strips, works of art - and the different contexts in which memory is conserved - in museums, documentaries, and first-hand accounts. The course will also explore the role of reference sources such as archives and documents in the construction of narratives of the past. The different campuses may choose to focus on a specific issue or theme, for example, "national narratives", the narratives of social emancipation, or the written history of wars or empires. The appropriation of history by different groups of people and disputations regarding the work of historians will be illustrated over distinct periods and in contrasting geographical situations.

The discussion sections and the reading sections are designed to provide students with the opportunity to work with the available sources. By specifying the chronologies, by resuming and reformulating the required knowledge, the pedagogical and intellectual ambition of this exercise is considerable: it consists of constructing an understanding of the past, admittedly with the questions of the present, and of doing so by building upon solid intellectual foundations. In short, it is a question of introducing our students to the discovery – with supporting texts, objects and images – of the profound otherness of those who precede us, thus giving true meaning to the term "political humanities".

Multidisciplinary course (24 hour lecture course - 3 ECTS credits)

The multidisciplinary course has a specific role within the major, facilitating an intersection of disciplinary perspectives with regard to transversal themes of study. For example, the theme of religion could be further explored with a course on the permanent and changing aspects of religion in contemporary societies. Starting from the Western context the course will show how, over the last three centuries, religion has been

transformed throughout the world, namely under the pressure of migratory movements and social transformation.

The course consists of two main components:

- The religion of individuals: reconstructions of belief have profoundly modified forms of religious adherence.
- The religion of institutions: secularisation and pluralisation have brought about internal changes to religious spheres.

Methodological workshops

The methodological workshops of the major are designed to facilitate students' development of a critical perspective on subjects that intersect the different disciplines addressed in their chosen lectures and seminars.

The aim is to provide students with interpretive tools that make it possible to employ the disciplinary skills acquired in history, political philosophy and the humanities in different contexts by applying them to the analysis of contemporary issues.

Methodological workshops focusing on history and political philosophy will be offered to students, in addition to cross-disciplinary workshops.

Five different methodological approaches are offered within the major:

- **History** workshops (1),
- **History** workshops (2),
- **Writing** workshops,
- **Rhetoric** workshops.
- **Discourse analysis** workshops

Definition of the various types of methodological workshops

History workshops (1),

The objective of this methodological workshop is to complement the approach outlined in the course and the associated discussion sections on narratives, representations and uses of the past. Different approaches are explored, ranging from an introduction to oral history, a reflection on heritage and museums, to history and the media. Presentations will be given on specific subjects related to different types of history (art history, cultural history, political history, social history) and each campus.

History workshops (2),

The workshop aims to practise the analysis of historical documents, by constructing detailed chronologies and by reformulating requisite knowledge. The pedagogical and intellectual ambition of this exercise is considerable. It consists of constructing an understanding of the past, admittedly with the questions of the present, and of doing so by building upon solid intellectual foundations. In short, it is a question of

introducing students to the discovery – with supporting texts, objects and images – of the profound otherness of those who precede us, thus giving true meaning to the term “political humanities”.

Writing workshops

The writing workshop provides an introduction to academic writing. When authors write to their editors to present the synopsis of their book; when researchers send abstracts of their articles to academic journals; when journalists pitch stories about a current issue; they are all conforming to specific writing requirements, in a specific editorial context, for a unique publication. However, they must all satisfy three conditions: formulate a convincing argument; present a hypothesis or a thesis; and write in a succinct, intelligible, and convincing manner. In this workshop different forms and styles of writing are examined. Practical written assignments develop skills in writing for different audiences and media. Sensitive to the constraints that weigh on the “art of writing”, dissident writing, circumventing censorship, plot and the hidden meaning of texts will all be explored, providing the opportunity to analyse examples of both skill and infelicity.

Rhetoric workshops

How does one speak well, defend one’s beliefs, express opinions, and convince others? The rhetoric course will present the classical techniques of expression, argumentation and persuasion, incorporating the notion that the art of speaking encompasses the arts of thinking and reading. This should not be understood as learning a set of formulae for effective speaking. In line with the political humanities major, political discourses that have left a mark on history will be given precedence as study material. An overview of the history of rhetoric and its complexities, from Aristotle to the present day, will be provided. These workshops will, however, also include practical elements involving opportunities for oratory jousting.

Discourse analysis workshops

In this methodological workshop, students will learn to deconstruct different types of discourse and cast a rational eye over the production of information in various media, through, for example, the critical analysis of storytelling, a communication technique that is widely used today in all fields of public action and management. Learning to deconstruct narratives and develop a distanced, ethical and epistemological reflection on the difference in status between different types of discourse will enable students to learn to question their own practices without taking for granted the elements of discourse with which they may find themselves confronted. The methodological workshops are at the crossroads of philosophical reflection, narrative and discourse analysis techniques, and epistemological inquiry. As such, they are designed to facilitate work in small groups with instructors from various disciplines to exercise students' critical thinking skills.