UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

On public philosophy: ideas and practices for interdisciplinary inquiry and societal change

2425-Bbetween-TRMH-02

Module description

On public philosophy: ideas and practices for interdisciplinary inquiry and societal change

Is philosophy only about abstract reasoning and the writings of past authors?
Are there practical, committed approaches to philosophy that serve as alternatives to the so-called "armchair philosophy"?
How can major philosophical ideas impact societies?
And, conversely, how do social phenomena and transformations influence philosophical research?

This module explores these questions and more, introducing participants to the perspective of "public philosophy," an emerging trend in the humanities that merges interdisciplinary analysis from the social sciences with the reflective and critical tools of moral and political philosophy. Public philosophy is thus a methodological approach to investigating the tensions and contradictions of society, but also, at the same time, a way to engage the public in critical examination and transformation of society itself.

Learning goals

The module aims to develop:
(i) philosophical skills in analytical and critical thinking and active, participative research skills on ethical-political issues;
(ii) soft skills in group collaboration, devising creative and innovative research approaches, and collective deliberation on ethically problematic decisions;
(iii) basic knowledge of some recent experiences in public philosophy on topics like public education, cultural and religious pluralism, human development, and social justice.

General goal

The module introduces students to public philosophy as an analytical and critical method that complements other humanities disciplines as a tool for investigating and transforming reality, particularly useful for research in education on emerging social problems based on critical reflection on the terms of debate.

Specific skills and competences

- Ability to identify the specificity of philosophy within research in the field of humanities.
- Ability to recognize some of the ideas and practices developed in the field of public philosophy.
- Ability to appreciate the ethical-political relevance of concepts such as research communities, post-secularism, human capability, human development, and social practice.
- Ability to analyze emerging issues within citizenship relations, dynamics of exclusion based on cultural and religious differences, and conditions of social injustice and discrimination. Ability to articulate ethical and social issues emerging within cases drawn from experiences of civic and professional engagement in the field.
- Ability to deliberate, individually and in groups, about possible courses of action to take in the face of ethically problematic situations.
- Ability to provide ethical justifications for one's conduct in public and reflectively evaluate one's role as a professional in education in light of a plurality of ethical and political ideals and values.

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Breakdown of meetings

The module explores four specific public philosophy experiences developed over recent decades. Each experience focuses on a different public interest issue and is examined through an author who has interpreted it:

1) On public education: Matthew Lipman and the Philosophy for Children
Monday 12 May 2025 from 13:30 to 16:30 in Aula Seminari (4288), Building U6-Agorà, 4th floor.

2) On cultural and religious pluralism: Jürgen Habermas and the post-secular public sphere
Tuesday 13 May 2025 from 13:30 to 16:30 in Aula Seminari (4288), Building U6-Agorà, 4th floor.

3) On human development: Martha Nussbaum and the capabilities approach
Wednesday 21 May 2025 from 12:30 to 15:30 in Aula Talchè (4285), Building U6-Agorà, 4th floor.

4) On social justice: Michael Sandel and the moral limits of markets
Tuesday 27 May 2025 from 10:30 to 13:30 in Aula Seminari (4288), Building U6-Agorà, 4th floor.

Course conclusion and Final Exam
Wednesday 28 May 2025 from 10:30 to 12:30 in Aula Seminari (room 4288), Building U6-Agorà, 4th floor.

The course uses a combination of teaching methods. All lessons consist of a part where ideas, authors, and texts are presented (direct lecture for about 1/3 of the lesson) and a large part dedicated to critical discussion of the lesson topics and group deliberation on ethical cases (interactive discussions and case work supervised by the teacher for about 2/3 of the lesson). Teaching materials used in the lesson will be made available online at the end of the lesson.

Overall, the instruction consists of **4 lessons of 3 hours each + 1 lesson of 2 hours dedicated to the final assessment** through a written test to be held in person.
Attendance is mandatory for at least 75% of classes.

At the end, 4 hours will have been dedicated to delivery teaching, 8 hours to interactive teaching, and 2 hours to the final assessment.

Number of participants

Unlimited.

Language used in meetings

The course is taught in English, and all activities are held in person.

Delivery period of the module

March-June 2025.

Methods of assessing the outcomes of the learning process

The examination consists of evaluating a short, written essay prepared by the students. Each participant will identify a topic of interest to critically explore, based on the discussions and experiences from the course, and with the support of materials agreed upon with the instructor (for example: a book, some scientific articles, or some guidance documents). The project is to be completed in the form of a paper to be written in person during the last lesson of the module.

The evaluation will consider 3 areas of knowledge and competence according to the following criteria:
a) Appropriate references that attest to knowledge of authors, theories, and texts discussed in class and in the texts in the bibliography (40% of the grade);
b) Ability to argue and originality of analysis in the development of the assigned prompt (35% of the grade);
c) Language propriety, precision, and order in presentation (25% of the grade).

Department of affiliation of the teacher

Department of Human Sciences for Education "Riccardo Massa"

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