

My master's experience

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Is genome editing morally permissible? Where does our conception of moral permissibility come from? What separates scientific knowledge from non-scientific knowledge? What are the limits of human reason? Does the mind work like a computer? Is consciousness a biological illusion? How should we navigate the ethical questions surrounding increasingly human-like artificial intelligence? Through the MSc in Epistemology, Ethics and Mind offered by the University of Edinburgh I had the opportunity to explore all these questions and much more.

As its name suggests, the MSc allows students to gain a thorough understanding of three core areas of contemporary philosophy, areas in which the University of Edinburgh has particular research strengths, namely: epistemology, ethics, and philosophy of mind and cognitive science.

The MSc is itself affiliated with the University of Edinburgh's Eidyn Research Centre, which hosts a number of large, ground-breaking, interdisciplinary research projects across epistemology, ethics, philosophy of mind and cognitive science, and philosophy of science. This research serves to directly inform the content of the MSc, ensuring that my fellow students and I were kept up to date with the latest developments in these three philosophical areas.

As one can tell from some of the questions put forward in my introduction, this programme does not revolve solely around abstract concepts and theories. Throughout my studies I was required to utilise the philosophical theories and frameworks I had learnt, to analyse, understand, and critically engage with a range of complex, real-world issues, associated with cutting-edge advances in science, medicine, and technology.

Naturally, one might wonder how such studies bear relevance to our own country. Malta is classified as an advanced economy by the International Monetary Fund ^[1] and an innovation-driven economy by the World Economic Forum ^[2]. In being so, Malta is in pole position to create and/or make use of the most cutting-edge advancements in science, medicine and technology. This is a very positive and exciting position for our country to be in. The potential for growth and prosperity which such advancements can bring is unlimited.

However, if Malta wishes to be at the forefront of innovation, it must invest in human capital capable of fully understanding and utilising the innovations of tomorrow. Many novel advancements, for example in artificial intelligence, or in new bio-medical tools and practices, are rife with unanswered philosophical and ethical questions. Just as Malta needs scientists, doctors, and engineers to help develop and implement such innovations, Malta also needs people who are knowledgeable in the philosophical and ethical dimensions of such innovations to help us answer the philosophical and ethical questions surrounding them and thus help us make better, more responsible, use of them.

[1] <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/data/changes.htm>

[2] http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GlobalCompetitivenessReport_2014-15.pdf

Therefore, in giving me the knowledge and skills needed to analyse, understand, and critically engage with such philosophical and ethical dimensions, my MSc will hopefully allow me to assist in the further development of our country.

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