Department of Religions & Theology

MODULE DESCRIPTION

Semester B:

“Religious” or “Secular”? Christian Ethics in Pluralist Democracies: BCRE18 (HE1118)

ECTS: 5
Contact hours: 22 Lecture Hours
Lecturer: Prof. Maureen Junker-Kenny (maureen.junker-kenny@tcd.ie/ext. 1044)

Module Description:
The boundary between “religious” and “secular” is at the centre of numerous assessments and contemporary debates: on whether, and in what sense, society can now be called “post-secular”, while the state should be neutral with regard to worldviews; whether the counterpart to “secular” should be classified as “faith-based”; or whether Johannes Brahms’s German Requiem, composed with personally selected biblical texts, should be seen as “secular” in distinction from the Latin text which counts as “religious”. Different conceptions of this fluctuating boundary will be analysed in order to situate Christian Ethics in contemporary culture and in debates on the public sphere. The second part of the module will trace in key examples how Christian Ethics has interacted with the traditions and thought forms it encountered from Early Christianity onwards. The four sources of Theological Ethics, their cultural backgrounds and premises will be analysed: 1) Scripture, 2) its reception in the practice of Christian communities and in the traditions of theological thinking, 3) a philosophical, general concept of the ‘normatively human’, and 4) the human sciences. The third part will explore concrete ethical issues as examples for their distinct perspectives. It will illustrate how Theological Ethics interacts with other disciplines, such as biblical studies and hermeneutics, systematic theology, philosophy, and the individual human sciences.

Learning Outcomes: On successful completion of this course, students will be able to
• distinguish different uses of the terms “religious” and “secular” and the contemporary theories they derive from
• illustrate the contributions of the four sources of Christian Ethics to the analysis of ethical questions
• trace the transformations of some biblical motifs in the processes of translation and reception into subsequent eras and cultures
• relate theological ethics to philosophical and theological anthropologies
• discuss contemporary positions on religion in modernity and on the role of religious convictions in the public sphere.

Methods of Assessment: 3000 word essay, deadline Fri, April 7, 2017.