BROAD CURRICULUM – MODULE DESCRIPTION 2018/19  BCPHLO

Title: Central Problems in Philosophy
Lecturer(s): Dr Kenneth Pearce and Dr Ben White  Contact
Hours:
Lectures: 22 lecture hours Tutorials: 5 tutorials
Credits: 5 ECTS

Module Content/Outline: This is a problem-based course, comprising the following components:

1st Semester/Michaelmas Term
Component 1 - Philosophy of Religion (Dr Pearce)
This component provides an introduction to philosophical reflection on religious belief and practice. We will focus on three questions:

• What is the relationship between faith and reason? Religious believers sometimes claim that their beliefs are a matter of faith and therefore do not need to be supported by reasons. Is this claim plausible? Should rational arguments against articles of faith be taken seriously? If it’s acceptable for someone to believe by faith (without evidence) that God exists, is it also acceptable for someone to believe by faith that 2+2=5?
• Can belief in God be rational? Philosophers have offered a variety of arguments for and against the existence of God. We will discuss a few of the arguments that have been most influential in the Western tradition.
• What is the nature of religious practice? Religions typically involve not only beliefs but also ritual practices. What is the point of these practices? Why do people engage in them? How is religious practice related to religious belief?

At the end of this component students will be able to:

• Describe some main philosophical questions related to religious belief and practice.
• Critically evaluate philosophical arguments concerning religious belief and practice.

Component 2 – Philosophy of Mind (Dr Ben White)
This component will consider some central concepts and debates in the philosophy of mind. We will focus on the mind-body problem. This problem concerns the relationship between mental states (e.g. sensations, thoughts, beliefs, desires) and physical states (e.g. neural patterns), and how the two might interact in order to cause our behaviour. Are our minds distinct from our brains, or are our sensations, thoughts, beliefs, and desires only particular patterns of neural activity? We will consider various theories that seek to solve the mind-body problem, including dualism, behaviourism, identity theory, and functionalism. Each of these theories differs in how they conceive the nature and role of mental states. An understanding of the problem will allow us to consider related topics in the philosophy of mind, such as consciousness, intentionality, and personal identity.
Learning Outcomes:
At the end of this component students will be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of important concepts in the philosophy of mind.
- Critically assess prominent arguments for and against the main positions on the mind-body question.

BROAD CURRICULUM – COURSE REQUIREMENT 2018/19
Students are required to submit one essay (1500 words) at the end of Michaelmas Term from either of the above module components. Submission date is Friday 30th November 2018. Students are required to attend tutorials which begin in Week 3 of teaching term – details to be advised at the start of Michaelmas Term. Students are not required to sit an examination.

Students are welcome to contact the Philosophy Dept. (philosophy@tcd.ie) if they have any further queries.