PhD Studentship at Trinity College Dublin: The Function of Scientific Relations

Provost’s PhD Project Awards

Applications are invited for a four-year funded PhD at Trinity College Dublin in philosophy of science and/or metaphysics for dissertation projects relating to the function and/or temporal asymmetry of scientific relations (such as laws, probabilities and causation).

The funding is for four years. It covers registration fees (either EU or non-EU) and includes a stipend of €17,316 per year.

Those interested in applying should contact Principle Investigator Alison Fernandes (alison.fernandes@tcd.ie) Department of Philosophy, Trinity College Dublin.

Applications must include a project proposal that shows how the applicant’s research relates to the project aims (see below).

Applications are to be made online. For further details on application requirements to the philosophy PhD program, see https://www.tcd.ie/philosophy/postgraduate/phd-programme/apply/index.php and https://www.tcd.ie/courses/postgraduate/how-to-apply/.

The deadline for applications is 31st March 2021.

Project Title: The Function of Scientific Relations

Project Aims:

The project articulates and defends an approach to the metaphysics of science based on considering the role of scientific relations. According to this ‘functionalist’ approach, our best guide to the nature of scientific relations is to consider why we reason in those terms. We can learn about what the world is like (a metaphysical question) by considering how scientific relations are useful to us (a scientific question).

The project aims to have three major philosophical outputs. Firstly, the project gives substantial accounts of the roles of key scientific relations, including causation, laws and chances. Understanding these roles will improve our understanding of how science operates and provides a unified conception of the scientific project.

Secondly, the project provides a new method for determining the natures of the scientific entities. Recent work in philosophy has acknowledged a strong need for metaphysics to be ‘naturalised’ and to pay proper attention to the science when figuring out the fundamental nature of the world. Thinking about function can provide a naturalised metaphysics of science—an account of the natures of the entities required to undergird our scientific theorising.
Thirdly, the project provides a systematic approach to explaining real and apparent temporal asymmetries. Part of the work of defending the functionalist account of scientific relations is to explain how relations such as causation can be or seem temporally asymmetric at our world, even if this is not due to their deep metaphysical nature. These explanations will contribute to a wider project of explaining real and apparent temporal asymmetries in scientific terms.

Overall, the project aims to use the function of scientific relations to explain what they are and why they are (or appear) temporal asymmetric.

**Responsibilities of the PhD Student:**

The PhD student will complete a dissertation relating to the function and/or temporal asymmetry of scientific modal relations. The dissertation might focus on function of a particular relation such as laws, causation or probability, the way a given relation’s function does (or doesn’t) relate to its temporal asymmetry, or more general topics relating to function, such as how function should (or shouldn’t) feature in the methodology for the metaphysics of science. The breadth of the research project allows scope for the student to explore particular areas, as well as to reach different conclusions about the role of function in the metaphysics of science. The student would undertake relevant coursework in the first year, give research talks at local work-in-progress seminars, and participate in professional development and feedback sessions. The student would also be expected to participate in research activities associated with the project including events run by the Irish Society for the Philosophy of Time <https://isphilosophytime.weebly.com/>.