1. What is essence?

- The ‘What is X?’ question (*ti esti* question) versus the question ‘What things are X and what can we discover about them?’ – examples – the idea of essence – the notion of a standard (paradigm, exemplar, model, ...)
- Is the *ti esti* question about words? Or about things? Or about both? – thinking and cutting up reality
- Why not simply answer the *ti esti* question by example-and-exemplar? – beauty and a particular human of exemplary beauty
- What more is involved in answering the *ti esti* question? – looking for a general, unitary and explanatory account of what something is

2. Why is it important to search for the essence of things?

- Why go beyond factual, empirical questions, of the form: ‘What things are X and what can we discover about them?’ and also ask the question ‘What is X’?
- The idea of *aporia* (puzzlement and conflicts of reasons) and of radical *aporia* – examples of radical *aporia*
- How radical *aporia* motivates us to ask the *ti esti* question in a probing way
- The Euthyphro dilemma and the search for essences – examples: goodness; colour; truth
- Why do we need the idea of determinate, well-defined things? → the principle of non-contradiction and its application to things
3. How can we search for the essence of things?
   - Plato’s way of searching for essence: dialectic
   - Should dialectic involve a historical dimension? – our ways of thinking are historically formed
   - The view that natural science, and natural science only or primarily, can search for the essence of things. – naturalism
   - Is the statement ‘Water is (essentially) H2O’ simply empirical? Or is there some philosophical view about the essence of things behind it?

4. What things have an essence?
   - Can we consider what things have an essence in any other way than by considering of what things the *ti esti* question is worth asking?
   - Do only the things considered in the natural sciences have an essence? Or do human things have an essence, too?
   - ‘In the natural science, essence is discovered, whereas in the human sciences, essence is invented.’ DISCUSS

Reading
Politis, V. ‘What is behind the *ti esti* question?’, in J. Fink (ed.), *The Development of Dialectic from Plato to Aristotle*. Cambridge 2012. Available upon request from vpolitis@tcd.ie