BROAD CURRICULUM – MODULE DESCRIPTION 2015/16
BCPHLO
Title: Central Problems in Philosophy
Lecturer(s): Professor Paul O’Grady and Dr. James Miller
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 (Prof. O’Grady)
This course offers an introduction to some of the main topics in philosophy of
religion. It analyses how philosophical approaches to religion differ from other
kinds of approach. Then two traditional arguments for God’s existence are
explored in some detail. The cosmological argument is one which seeks to
argue from certain phenomena in the world to the existence of a non-spatio-
temporal cause of these. The general features of such arguments are
explored as well as standard objections to them. Then a classical and a
modern version of this argument are examined. The argument to design is
another traditional argument for God’s existence. A famous version of this
from William Paley is examined along with important objections to it from
evolutionary theory and from the great Scottish philosopher, David Hume.
Then a modern version of this argument developed by Richard Swinburne is
assessed. Finally the problem of evil is examined. This is the supposed
incompatibility of the existence of an all good and all powerful God with the
existence of evil. Different versions of the argument are explored and the free
will defence in the version devised by Alvin Plantinga is assessed.
Component 2 – Philosophy of Mind (Dr. Miller)
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 the mental (beliefs, thoughts, desires) and
the physical (neural patterns), and how the two might interact in order to
cause our behaviour. Are our minds separate from our brains, or are our
thoughts only particular patterns of neurons firing? 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
on whether they accept the existence and role of mental states. An
understanding of the problem will allow us to consider related topics such as
consciousness, whether we could survive our minds being uploaded to a
computer, and intentionality.
BROAD CURRICULUM – COURSE REQUIREMENT 2015/16
Students are required to submit one essay at the end of Michaelmas Term
from either of the above module components. Submission date is Monday
18th January’16. 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. (ucmpbell@tcd.ie) if they have any further queries.