



DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

FIRST YEAR B.A.  
STUDENT HANDBOOK

2020–2021

## WELCOME TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is an ancient discipline. In fact, in the beginnings of the Western world, there was no division of the branches of knowledge as we know them—such as medicine, physics, chemistry, theology, English, sociology, etc. There was only the ‘love of wisdom’, which is how the Greek word ‘philosophy’ (φιλοσοφία) is often translated. All the other ‘subjects’ developed later.

Philosophy is for you if you are interested in learning more about this ‘love of wisdom’. As a ‘love’, philosophy requires a certain zeal or passion: the passion to learn more about what it means to be human, why the world is the way it is, in all its glory but also in its brokenness. As a quest for ‘wisdom’, philosophy aims at more than technical knowledge. Thus, as a philosophy student you will learn what philosopher X taught about subject Y; more importantly, however, you will start thinking philosophically yourself, asking the ‘big questions’ and at least understanding their meaning and depth. (Philosophy is a difficult subject—answers come much later than questions!)

The Philosophy Department in Maynooth has a long history that goes back to 1795, when ‘The Royal College of St Patrick’ was first founded here. This makes philosophy one of the oldest subjects taught formally at Irish universities. This having been said, philosophy has a much longer history in this country. One of the most famous philosophers of the Middle Ages, John Scottus Eriugena, was an Irishman. He was even featured on the old Irish 5 punt banknote—that was before the Euro, of course!



The Philosophy Department in Maynooth has six full-time faculty members, an administrator, and several part-time members of staff, who teach individual modules or tutorials.

## WHY STUDY PHILOSOPHY?

You study philosophy first of all for yourself. You are a human being who has fundamental questions about his or her life, and about the world that surrounds you. You want to know what love is, and where evil comes from. You have wondered whether there is a God or not. You want to read and discuss texts that discuss these and other fundamental issues. You want to lead an 'examined life', as Socrates famously put it.

But there is also the reality of having to earn a living. So, what is philosophy good for, more practically speaking?

The expertise gained in philosophy is of value in many different careers. Philosophy is a good preparation for an academic career, for journalism, law, radio and television (and the media in general), for politics and public service, and increasingly, philosophy graduates are being hired by large corporations. Philosophy graduates are valued for their quick intelligence, and their ability to take an overview on the problem or situation confronting them. Most importantly, philosophers have learnt to reason clearly and independently: to 'think outside the box'.

At Maynooth, you will combine philosophy with at least one other subject. This is an opportunity to gear your degree towards a particular career, if you so wish. Also, you may consider the new degrees that Philosophy offers in conjunction with other departments: the BA in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE), and the BSc in Computational Thinking, which links Philosophy with Computer Science and Mathematics.

If you have questions about your philosophy degree or your modules, do not hesitate to ask us.

## CONTENTS

Welcome to the Department of Philosophy .....	1
Why Study Philosophy?.....	2
Members of Staff .....	4
Some Practical Information .....	5
First Semester.....	8
Second Semester .....	9
Examinations Marking System .....	11
Thomas A. F. Kelly Prize .....	12
Studying Abroad .....	12
International Students .....	13
Non-Philosophy Students Wishing to Take a Philosophy Module.....	13
Essay Submission Procedures .....	14

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## SOME PRACTICAL INFORMATION

### *Notice Boards, Moodle, and Website*

The Department's notice boards, Moodle, and the website are important methods of communicating with students. Important information (such as tutorial times and lists, changes in the timetable or in lecture times) will be posted there from time to time. Please consult these notice boards, Moodle, and the website regularly.

### *Student Emails*

Likewise, please check your university email account regularly, as this is an important means of communication with the university. You will have received your personal student email account at registration.

### *The Library*

If you enjoy books and reading, the library is the place to be. Many students also use the library to study or simply to relax. Typically, you will use the library more actively as your studies advance and more research is required of you. A lot of material is available online, but a trip to the library is still worthwhile. You will find many books and journals there that have not been digitized.

If you have questions about the library, you are welcome to contact Áine Carey (aine.carey@mu.ie) or Saoirse de Paor (Saoirse.DePaor@mu.ie). They can explain what you need to know.



Fun fact: Maynooth actually has two libraries. Most of you will only ever see the new one, just across the road from the new university, on the edge of the south campus. St Patrick's College's original library is the Russell Library, which was completed in 1861. It can be visited by appointment only as it contains thousands of valuable books and manuscripts going back to the sixteenth century.

### *Staff-Student Committee*

Students from each year elect two representatives for this committee, whose purpose is to allow students to provide feedback to the Department about their educational experience. Concerns about a module that could not be resolved by speaking to the individual lecturer can be brought to this committee as well. The Department is represented by the head of department, Prof. Philipp Rosemann, by Prof. Michael Dunne, and Dr Amos Edelheit.

There will be an opportunity to elect two student representatives in PH153, towards the beginning of the first semester. The head of department will invite them to an initial chat.

### *National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015–2019*

The Irish government has made it a high priority to ensure that the national universities are open to students of all backgrounds. Whether you are the first in your family to attend college, a mature student, a student with disabilities, an Irish Traveller, or indeed belong to any other group that traditionally has had difficulty in accessing higher education, the University is here to help you. Philosophy is about broadening one's imagination of who one is and wants to be. For questions regarding these matters, please speak with Dr Amos Edelheit.

### *Registration and Credits*

At the beginning of each semester, students register *online* for the modules they wish to take. Each module comes with a particular number of credits, which are also called 'ECTS credits' (ECTS = European Credit Transfer System). You need to make sure to accumulate enough credits to graduate. A normal academic year of full-time study over two semesters is worth 60 credits for undergraduates.

The first-year B.A. programme in Philosophy requires 15 credits. The two modules that the Department offers for first-year students count for 7.5 credits each. They are PH153 (first semester) and PH154 (second semester), and are described in the following pages. Each of these two modules is made up of 33 lecture hours, spread over 11 weeks (so there are 3 hours per week). In addition, you are expected to attend tutorials.

Lecture times and venues are found in the 'courses' section of the University website and on the departmental notice board. Please consult the Moodle page for PH153 and PH154 for any changes or updates in relation to attendance.

Lectures commence on Monday, September 28<sup>th</sup>.

### *Tutorials*

You should register for tutorials through the Moodle page for PH153 during the first week of term. Details of the tutorial groups and times will be posted to Moodle and will also be available on the Philosophy Department notice board, which is located in the corridor outside of the departmental office. Please check your modules on Moodle regularly.

Tutorials commence in the third week of classes (i.e., towards the end of October).



### *Programme Advisory Office*

The Programme Advisory Office has been created to assist undergraduate students, including incoming first-year students, with programme-related decisions both before and after the registration period. If you have questions about your degree pathway (what degree programmes are available, what subjects can be combined, etc.), or if you are wondering how electives work, send them an email ([programme.choices@mu.ie](mailto:programme.choices@mu.ie)), give them a call (01 474 7428), or drop by their office (Rowan House, room 1.17).



Plato's Cave



## FIRST SEMESTER

### **PH153: Introduction to Philosophy: Twelve Philosophers** (Prof. Philipp Rosemann)

As a first introduction to the subject, this module will study twelve thinkers who were decisive in shaping Western philosophy. Thus, each of the twelve weeks will be devoted to one philosopher; typically these are Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Eriugena, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger. The focus of our work in class will be the reading of one short and famous text by each of the twelve thinkers. We will read these texts together. The instructor will provide interpretation as well as historical context; for philosophy does not arise in a void: it is always a reflection both of and upon its own conditions.

#### *Learning Outcomes*

On successful completion of the module, students should be able to:

- identify an essential theme in the thought of each of the twelve philosophers;
- distinguish various fundamental phases in the development of Western philosophy (e.g., ancient Greek, medieval, modern, contemporary);
- recognise some of the main branches that philosophy developed in the course of its history (e.g., natural philosophy, ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language);
- distinguish philosophy from other intellectual pursuits, such as poetry, theology, natural science, and history.

#### *Assessment*

100% continuous assessment, broken down as follows:

- attendance and participation in tutorials (10%);
- one tutorial essay assignment (ca. 1,000 words) (30%);
- one module essay assignment (ca. 1,500 words) (60%).

Repeat Option: module essay assignment (ca. 2,500 words = 100%)

## SECOND SEMESTER

### **PH154: Topics in Moral Philosophy: Law, Morality, Punishment, and Rights** (Dr Elizabeth Meade)

This module addresses three important questions of moral concern in society today, namely: Should the law be used to enforce morality as such, or legislate only against what does harm to others? What justifies the state's infliction of punishment on those who infringe the law? Is everything we claim a right to, a right, or can there be unjustified claims to rights? In this way, students will be introduced to contemporary moral philosophical debate on three important topics regarding (1) the proper relation of morality to law, (2) the justification of punishment, and (3) the history and concept of rights. Towards the end of the module, some attention will be given to some important moral controversies surrounding the protection of human life and the environment.

#### *Learning Outcomes*

On successful completion of the module, students should be able to:

- identify and assess the opposing views on the proper relation of morality to law: to legislate against immorality as such or only against that which is damaging to society;
- discriminate between moral and non-moral dimensions of the nature and purpose of law;
- distinguish the concept of punishment from the issue of its moral justification, with reference to the retributive, reformative, and deterrent theories of punishment;
- explain and evaluate the effectiveness of the use of metaphors in the debate on crime and punishment (e.g., 'balancing the scales of justice', 'paying a debt back to society');
- describe main historical factors that influenced the development of the concept of rights: thirteenth-century natural law theory (Aquinas), seventeenth-century social contract theories (Hobbes and Locke), and the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English, American, and French revolutions;
- recognise and evaluate different definitions for the meaning of the concept of a right (as a liberty, a permission, a claim, a judicial remedy, a power, an interest, a relative duty) used in contemporary moral discourse;
- analyse and evaluate particular controversial rights, such as: the right to revolt, the right to peace, the right to life, the right to euthanasia, the right to eat animals, animal rights, the right to use nature's resources in the planet, ecological rights;
- demonstrate the ability to select, think through, and present an articulated and pertinent response to issues of moral concern in society today in contemporary moral philosophy.

### *Assessment*

40% continuous assessment (broken down as follows):

- tutorial attendance and participation (10%);
- mid-term essay assignment (c. 1,500 words) (30%).

60% final written examination (2 hours × 2 questions to be answered).

Repeat Option: autumn sitting of a final written examination (60%), with continuous assessment mark carried over.

Please note that due to the on-going Covid-19 situation there may be changes in terms of attendance policies, assignments, assessment, tutorials etc. Please consult with the lecturer in question if you have any questions and pay particular attention to notifications from the Department, on Moodle etc.

## EXAMINATIONS MARKING SYSTEM

Letter Grade	Descriptive Heading	%	Class
A++	answer that could not be bettered	100	I
A+	exceptional answer displaying unexpected insight	90	I
A	undoubtedly first class, flawless answer, demonstrating originality	80	I
A-	almost flawless answer demonstrating some originality	70	I
B+	extremely high competence, perhaps displaying limited originality or technical flaws or minor errors	68	II-1
B	fundamentally correct and demonstrating overall competence	65	II-1
B-	competent performance, substantially correct answer but possibly containing minor flaws or omissions	60	II-1
C+	awarded on the basis of the answer being somewhat better than a C but below a B-	58	II-2
C	basically correct answer with minor errors or one major error/omission	55	II-2
C-	awarded on the basis of the answer being somewhat below a C but better than a D+	50	II-2
D+	no more than adequate answer	48	III
D	adequate answer with serious errors or omissions	45	P
D-	lowest passing grade, barely deserving to pass	40	P
E+	The answer is inadequate and does not deserve to pass.	38	F
E	The answer fails to address the question properly but displays some knowledge of the material.	35	F
E-	Answer fails to address the question.	30	F
F+	little relevant or correct material but some evidence of engagement with question	20	F
F	very little relevant or correct material	10	F
F-	totally irrelevant answer	0	F

## THOMAS A. F. KELLY PRIZE

The Thomas A. F. Kelly Prize was established in memory of the late Professor Thomas Kelly (1957–2008), a beloved and larger-than-life philosopher and Renaissance man whose tenure as the Chair of Philosophy at Maynooth was much too short. He died at only fifty years of age.

The Thomas A. F. Kelly Annual Prize is awarded to the best student in Philosophy in First Arts. It takes the form of a book token. The prize is conferred at the annual prize giving ceremony.

## STUDYING ABROAD

Spending some time abroad can be an invaluable part of one's education. Living in another country teaches us to view our own culture in a new light, allowing us to understand both its weaknesses and its strengths. It has been said that learning another language is like acquiring another soul. Language is not just a means of communication; it opens up a world. The contemporary German philosopher Martin Heidegger even declared language to be 'the house of being'.



Fortunately, all students at Maynooth University have the opportunity to study abroad as part of their degree. Students travel abroad in their third year of study, returning to complete their final year in Maynooth before graduating. All students are invited to apply for study-abroad opportunities *early in their second year*. The entire third year is spent abroad, so that a three-year B.A. degree turns into a four-year B.A. International degree. In other words, one gains an additional year of study.

But there are certain conditions. Thus, all students wishing to study abroad must successfully pass their first- and second-year modules. Furthermore, since one applies to study abroad early in the second year, it is important to do well in one's first-year modules. This is because our partner universities will judge applications based on first-year results. Finally, students wishing to study abroad in non-EU destinations must pass all of their modules in the summer. It is not possible to go to a non-EU country and sit the autumn repeat examinations.

Students interested in studying abroad should contact Dr Amos Edelheit.

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students who wish to study philosophy at Maynooth University are free to attend most of the modules offered by the Department during the semester or year of their visit. There may be certain restrictions imposed by the student's home institution.

As noted, our first-year modules are worth 7.5 credits each. Please pay heed to this fact when putting together your programme of studies, so that you do not end up falling short of your home institution's requirements.

International students select the modules in which they wish to enrol online, just like everyone else. The international coordinator of the Department approves (or, in rare cases, does not approve) these choices. After arriving here, if a student needs to change a module (because of a timetabling conflict, for example) he or she should contact the international coordinator. The Philosophy Department's coordinator for international students is *Dr Amos Edelheit*, who will be happy to advise you.

### *Examination Procedures for Visiting International Students*

There is no difference in how 'home' and visiting international students are assessed. This applies except if in the first semester, a module has a final written examination in January. In its place, international students (who presumably leave the country at Christmas) will do an essay assignment set by the module lecturer.

## NON-PHILOSOPHY STUDENTS WISHING TO TAKE A PHILOSOPHY MODULE

Non-philosophy students who wish to take a philosophy module are more than welcome. The first-year modules will not be more difficult for them than for philosophy students. Advanced second- or third-year modules may be a different matter. Before you enrol in such a module, it is wise to speak with the lecturer concerned or with the head of department.

## ESSAY SUBMISSION PROCEDURES

The Department no longer accepts essays submitted in hard copy. Please submit all tutorial and final essays through Moodle. You need to observe the published deadline. It is unprofessional to submit an essay late.

For the final essay of each module, late submissions will not be accepted at all, unless you have obtained an extension from the module lecturer. Submit requests for an extension, stating the reasons for your request, via email at least a week before the submission due date, to the lecturer teaching the module. Include supporting documentation, such as a medical certificate. The lecturer will let you know his or her decision. Please note that extensions cannot be granted beyond the end of the relevant examination period.

### *A Note on Plagiarism*

It was always tempting for some students to ‘cheat’ on essays by lifting parts from a book or even enlisting a friend’s help. Needless to say, what this does is prevent the student from learning how to think and write. It is, in the end, up to each individual what to make of the educational opportunity that he or she is offered: put it to good use or waste it.

In the Internet age, plagiarism—as the presentation of another’s work as one’s own is called—has become so easy that many universities, including Maynooth, now ask students to submit their essays via Turnitin, which is a software that helps detect plagiarism. It ‘reads’ an essay against millions of sources (including even other student essays) in the database. It is therefore highly unlikely that anyone will get away with plagiarism. Please don’t attempt it. Cases of plagiarism are automatically referred to the head of department, who will proceed according to the University’s published policy, which is available at this link:

[https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/MU%20Policy%20on%20Plagiarism%20Sept%202015v-1\\_0.pdf](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/MU%20Policy%20on%20Plagiarism%20Sept%202015v-1_0.pdf).

Sometimes it is tricky to determine what is plagiarism and what is not. In the course of your studies in Maynooth, you will learn how to cite sources correctly, so that it is always clear on whose words or ideas you are relying in developing your own thought. Likewise, you will learn how to format an essay according to proper academic standards.