Philosophy, Science, and Religion MSc

Mind, Matter, and Spirit (Online)

THET11055
Course Guide 2019-20

Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to ‘Mind, Matter, and Spirit’! This course is highly interdisciplinary, exploring some of the most significant questions in the field of science & religion: What is mind, and how does it relate to physical matter? How does mind relate to religious conceptions of God, who is often considered to be relational, conscious, and spiritual? Are there limits to what science can tell us about consciousness (both human and divine)? Addressing such questions is an inherently interdisciplinary task, and requires engagement with such fields as philosophy of mind, metaphysics, neurobiology, psychology, and theology. This course introduces students to the complex questions involved, emphasizing theological and philosophical challenges to scientific approaches to mentality, but also scientific challenges to religious claims about the mind.

People

Course Organiser:
Name: Dr Sarah Lane Ritchie
Email: sarah.laneritchie@ed.ac.uk
Office Hours: Online meetings available upon request

Additional Instructors:
Name: Dr Michael Fuller
Email: Michael.fuller@ed.ac.uk
Name: Dr Tripp Fuller
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Course Secretary:
Name: Jessica Wilkinson
Email: jessica.wilkinson@ed.ac.uk
Name: Anne Donnelly
Email: anne.donnelly@ed.ac.uk

Office hours

Please email Dr Sarah Lane Ritchie to make an appointment if you need to discuss material covered in the course or essay topics.

Course aims and objectives

The relationship between mind and matter is one of the key questions in the science-and-religion discussion. This course explores the various dynamics of this relationship by engaging with the relevant scientific, philosophical, and religious concepts involved. Students will gain an understanding of what is at stake for theology and religious traditions, philosophy, and the scientific disciplines when addressing the relationship between mind, matter, and possible spiritual realities. Attention is paid to particular concepts and approaches relevant to the mind/matter question, such as: naturalism, physicalism, the question of the soul, panpsychism, and evolutionary pneumatology. The goal is to provide a clear understanding of the conceptual challenges and possibilities for both science and religion when considering the relationship between mentality and the material world. The course will enable students to engage and critically evaluate perspectives from a variety of disciplines on the relationship between mind and matter, and to do so in a manner that prioritizes interdisciplinary dialogue.

Intended learning objectives

On completion of this course, the student will be able to:

● Demonstrate an understanding of key scientific, philosophical, and religious approaches to the relationship between mind and matter.

● Demonstrate the ability to engage in interdisciplinary analysis of given aspects of the mind/matter relationship, bringing science and religion into constructive conversation with each other.

● Develop an ability to critically engage key texts within an interdisciplinary context.

● Engage in constructive and critical debate with peers.

● Demonstrate an ability to identify what is at stake (scientifically and theologically) in various approaches to the course themes.
## Learning, teaching and assessment

### Syllabus
Schedule of lectures, seminars, tutorials and assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>13 January</td>
<td>Mind and Matter</td>
<td>Dr Sarah Lane Ritchie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>20 January</td>
<td>God and World</td>
<td>Dr Sarah Lane Ritchie</td>
<td>Assessed Discussion Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>27 January</td>
<td>What is a Person?: Soul</td>
<td>Dr Michael Fuller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>3 February</td>
<td>What is a Person?: The <em>Imago Dei</em></td>
<td>Dr Michael Fuller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>10 February</td>
<td>What is a Person?: Mind and Body</td>
<td>Dr Sarah Lane Ritchie</td>
<td>Assessed Discussion Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>24 February</td>
<td>AI and Mind</td>
<td>Dr Michael Fuller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>2 March</td>
<td>‘God Spots’, Near-death Experiences, and Neurotheology: How might spiritual experiences relate to the brain?</td>
<td>Dr Michael Fuller</td>
<td>Assessed Discussion Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>9 March</td>
<td>Transcendence: Mysticism, Religious Experiences, and Religious Naturalism</td>
<td>Dr Sarah Lane Ritchie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>16 March</td>
<td>Panpsychism</td>
<td>Dr Tripp Fuller</td>
<td>Assessed Discussion Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>23 March</td>
<td>Spirit (Part 1): Wolfhart Pannenberg</td>
<td>Dr Tripp Fuller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>30 March</td>
<td>Spirit (Part 2): Evolutionary Pneumatology</td>
<td>Dr Sarah Lane Ritchie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Topics and Required Reading (Additional recommended readings, as well as required readings, can be found on the Resource List within the course’s Learn Page.)

**Week 1 – Mind and Matter**

What is reality? Do religious conceptions of reality require a strict distinction between the ‘natural’ and ‘supernatural’? What is the role of mind in the relationship between nature and the supernatural? This week explores the metaphysical and philosophical topics of naturalism, materialism, and physicalism.

**Essential Reading:**


**Week 2 – God and World**

What is the relationship between God and the physical universe? Is the mind natural or uniquely spiritual? Subjects include theistic naturalism, panentheism, and the “causal joint.”

**Essential Reading:**


**Week 3 – What is a Person?: Soul**

This week examines theological anthropology, and the relationship between mind, body, and soul.

**Essential Reading:**

Week 4 – What is a Person?: The Imago dei

What does it mean to be made in the “image of God”?

Essential Reading:


Week 5 – What is a Person?: Mind and Body

What does it mean to be conscious, and what role should intuition play in our approach to the mind-body problem?

This week examines the so-called “Hard Problem of Consciousness,” and interdisciplinary perspectives on the relationship between mind and body.

Essential Reading:

Recommended Video: David Chalmers, “The Hard Problem of Consciousness.” Serious Science. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5DfnjZPGw


Philip Clayton, ‘Neuroscience, the Person, and God: An Emergentist Approach,’ Zygon 35:3 (613-652).

**Week 7 – ‘God Spots’, Near-death Experiences, and Neurotheology: How might spiritual experiences relate to the brain?**

It would appear uncontroversial to assume that experiences we classify as ‘religious’ – such as experiences of God – might have corresponding brain activity associated with them. What might a theologically sensitive approach to such experiences look like?

**Essential Reading:**


**Week 8 – Transcendence: Mysticism, Religious Experience, and Religious Naturalism**

How should the human experience of transcendence be understood? This week examines both religious and non-religious approaches to exceptional, transformative spiritual experiences.

**Essential Reading:**


**Week 9 – Panpsychism**

Do all physical realities have experience or experience mentality? This week examines the theological, scientific, and philosophical aspects of panpsychism.

**Essential Reading:**


**Week 10 – Spirit (Part 1): Wolfhart Pannenberg**

German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg is one of the most fascinating thinkers in the science-religious dialogue. Among many other things, he developed an intriguing theory integrating physics (field theory) and pneumatology (the study of the Holy Spirit).

**Essential Reading:**


**Week 11 – Spirit (Part 2): Evolutionary Pneumatology**

This week explores various ways of understanding the role of ‘Spirit’ in the natural world, exploring both Christian pneumatology and inter-religious approaches.

**Essential Reading:**


**Resources**

Reading list materials are available via the course LEARN site. Please ensure you have completed the library induction tutorial. Should you have any problems accessing any of the materials for the course please contact the course librarian, Mrs Anne Donnelly: anne.donnelly@ed.ac.uk

**Assessment**

Discussion Board Participation (15%)
15% of the final course mark will be determined by the student's successful participation in the online course discussion board, which will be assessed on four pre-determined weeks throughout the semester. The requirements and guidance for discussion board postings can be found on Learn.

**Essay (85%)**

This course will primarily be assessed through the submission of an essay of no more than 3000 words on a topic chosen by the student. The student must consult with the course organiser on the chosen topic. This essay will account for 85% of the student's course mark. The essay is due at 12 noon on Tuesday, 21\textsuperscript{st} April, 2020 GMT.

**Live Seminars**

There will be four live seminars scheduled throughout the semester. While participation in these seminars is not assessed, students are strongly encouraged to attend and participate. These seminars have proven vital to the learning experience and outcomes for students, and provide an important opportunity for direct interaction with the instructor and other students.

**How to submit assessments**

Instructions for online essay submission is available on Learn.

**Marking and feedback**

Essays are marked by a member of academic staff, and moderated by a second member of academic staff. Markers will provide feedback on the content and quality of the essay. Essays are marked within 15 working days of their submission.

In addition to formal assessment, students have the opportunity to submit a piece of writing for feedback. *This essay is not required*, and cannot be a draft of an essay submitted for assessment. If a student wishes to submit this formative essay, it is due by 12 noon on Thursday, 5\textsuperscript{th} March, 2020, GMT.

**External examiners**

Professor Michael Reiss