MSc in Philosophy, Science, and Religion

Philosophy, Science, and Religion 2: Life and Mind

THET11046
Welcome and Introduction

Welcome to ‘Philosophy, Science, and Religion 2: Life and Mind’ (or PSR2). Please read this course guide very carefully, as it contains most of the information you will need to successfully complete this course. I look forward to working with you this semester!

People

Course Organiser:
Name: Dr Sarah Lane Ritchie
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Office: New College 2.05
Office hours: Upon Request

Teaching Assistant:
Name:
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Office:
Office hours:

Course Secretary:
Name: Jessica Wilkinson
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Course Librarian:
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

This is a level 11 course for students seeking an advanced introduction to contemporary issues in the intersection of science and religion. This course will provide students with the necessary background to complete the online MSc programme in Philosophy, Science and Religion. Students will gain an understanding of the relevant science – including evolutionary biology and psychology – and the relationship of these with issues in theology and religious belief – including the doctrine of creation, the existence of the soul, and life after death.

Intended learning objectives

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

- Demonstrate a good understanding of the key areas in the current science-religion interface—including cosmology, evolution, and the neurosciences—and will be able to engage with them philosophically.
- Demonstrate strong analytical skills and philosophical acumen in approaching debates between science and theology.
- Engage critically with key textual sources in the field.
- Engage constructively in cross-disciplinary conversations.
- Demonstrate an openness to personal growth through a commitment to dialogue across intellectual and cultural boundaries.
Learning, teaching and assessment

Syllabus

Schedule of lectures, seminars, tutorials and assessments

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Topics and reading

For general reading for this course, please consult the following textbook.

**MODULE 1: SCIENCE FROM A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE**

In this module we consider two key issues in the philosophy of science: the demarcation between science and pseudoscience, and scientific perspectivism. There are clear instances of genuine science and clear instances of quackery, but is it possible to provide criteria to distinguish between science and pseudoscience, and what are the epistemological implications of this distinction? Science aims at objectivity, but it is conducted by cognitively limited human beings. How can we best make sense of the idea that scientific representation and explanation is perspectival in nature?

**Week 1 – Science and Pseudoscience**

*Essential reading:*


*Further Reading*


**Week 2 – Scientific Perspectivalism**

*Essential reading:*


*Further Reading:*


**MODULE 2: RELIGION AND EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY**

In this module we explore the relationship between evolutionary biology and religion. What is evolutionary biology, what is the evidence for the central claims of neo-Darwinian biology,
and how has it changed in recent times? How have theologians reacted to and appropriated evolutionary thought? What exactly is supposed to be the conflict between evolution and religion, and does evolution, as some have claimed, rationally undermine atheism rather than theism?

**Week 3 – Our Evolutionary History**

**Essential reading:**

Finlay, Graeme (2013), Human Evolution: Genes, Genealogies and Phylogenies. CUP. Prologue and chapter 1.

**Further Reading:**


Finlay, Graeme (2013), Human Evolution: Genes, Genealogies and Phylogenies. CUP.


**Week 4 – Evolution and Scripture**

**Essential Reading:**


**Further Reading:**

de Pomerai, D. and Harris, M. (2017), ‘Creationism and evolutionary biology – science or pseudoscience?’, in Philosophy, Science and Religion for Everyone

**Week 5 – Evolution and Atheism**

**Essential reading:**

Further Reading:

Nagel, Thomas (2012), Mind and Cosmos. OUP.

Week 6 – Teilhard de Chardin

Essential reading:


Further Reading:


MODULE 3: RELIGION AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES

In this module we consider how developments in the human sciences can help us to understand both religion and the relationship between science and religion. What does sociological research tell us about the interaction between science and religion? One of the goals of cognitive science is to study the way we form beliefs. What can cognitive science tell us about the formation of religious beliefs and attitudes? Do developments in cognitive science show that the mind is or supervenes upon the brain and other physical structures? Does cognitive science, in other words, undermine any reason to think we have immaterial souls? And, if so, what are the implications for theological doctrines involving life after death?

Week 7 – Social Science and the Relationship Between Science and Religion

Essential reading:

Further Reading:


Week 8 – The Cognitive Science of Religion

Essential reading:


Further Reading:


Week 9 – Do You Have a Soul?

Essential reading:


Further Reading:


Swinburne, Richard (2013), Mind, Brain, and Free Will. OUP.


**Week 10 – Transhumanism**

**Essential reading:**


**Further reading:**


**Week 11 – Are You Made in the Image of God?**

**Essential reading:**


**Further readings:**


Michael Fuller, Dirk Evers, Anne Runehov, Knut-Willy Sæther (eds.) (2017), Issues in Science and Theology: Are We Special?. Springer.

**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**
Coursework (85%)

This course will primarily be assessed through the submission of an essay of no more than 2500 words on a question of your choice (essay topic to be agreed upon in consultation with the course organiser). This will account for 85% of the student's course mark. **The deadline for the summative essay is Tuesday 21st April 2020 at 12 noon.**

Participation (15%)

The remaining 15% of the final course mark will be determined by the student's successful participation in the on-line activities associated with the course, such as relevant postings on the course discussion board. (Information on discussion board participation and assessment can be found under the 'Assessment' tab on the course's Learn page. Additional guidance will be given by one of the instructors on the discussion board itself.)

There is also the option to submit an optional, non-graded formative essay for additional feedback. The deadline for the optional essay is Thursday 5th March 2020 at 12 noon.

For details of grading criteria, details on word count and referencing, penalties for exceeding the word count or for late submissions, and many other issues please consult the Programme Handbook, available on the Philosophy Hub Page. It is recommended that all students read the Programme Handbook carefully.

**How to submit assessments**

Submission guidelines and links can be found on the course Learn page.

**Marking and feedback**

For details of grading criteria, details on word count and referencing, penalties for exceeding the word count or for late submissions, and many other issues please consult the Programme Handbook, available on the Philosophy Hub Page. It is recommended that all students read the Programme Handbook carefully. Feedback for submitted work will be provided within 15 working days.

**External examiners**

Professor Michael Reiss