



DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

FIRST YEAR B.A. STUDENT
HANDBOOK

2021–2022

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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!



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 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.

MEMBERS OF STAFF

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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.

Staff	Function	Email	Office	Phone (708-)
Prof. Philipp Rosemann	<i>Head of Department</i>	philipp.rosemann@mu.ie	Room 12 Arts Building	3575
Ms Ann Gleeson	<i>Department Administrator</i>	ann.gleeson@mu.ie	Room 10/11 Arts Building	3661
Dr Brandt Dainow	<i>Occasional Lecturer</i>	brandt.dainow@mu.ie	Education House 3B3	6158
Prof. William Desmond	<i>Thomas A. F. Kelly Visiting Chair</i>	william.desmond@ hiw.kuleuven.be		
Prof. Michael Dunne	<i>Professor</i>	michael.w.dunne@mu.ie	Room 17 Arts Building	3697
Dr Amos Edelheit	<i>Lecturer</i>	amos.edelheit@ mu.ie	Room 16 Arts Building	3680
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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. Look out for information on the nomination and election process from the MU Students'

Union! 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, Dr Amos Edelheit, and Dr Cyril McDonnell.

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. PH153 is made up of 33 lecture hours, spread over 11 weeks (so there are 3 hours per week). PH154 comprises 36 lecture hours, spread over 12 weeks (3 hours per week). In addition, you are expected to attend one weekly tutorial in a small group.

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 for PH153 commence on Monday, 27th September 2021.

Lectures for PH154 commence on Monday, 31st January 2022.

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 (Room 10/11 Arts Building). Please check your modules on Moodle regularly.

Tutorials for PH153 commence in the third week of classes (i.e., the week beginning Monday, 11th October) and run for 9 weeks (i.e., to end of the semester).

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).



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. The focus of our work in class will be the reading of one short and famous text by each of the twelve thinkers. These typically include Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Eriugena, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Arendt. Their texts serve as introductions not only to particular periods of philosophy, but also to some of the great questions which philosophy attempts to answer, such as: What is truth? What is happiness? What is love? Is there a God? We will read these texts together and discuss them. The instructor will provide interpretation and historical context.

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;
- describe the historical situations in which these philosophies arose;
- 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., 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 (20%); one mid-term essay (ca. 1,000 words) (30%); one final essay (ca. 1,500 words) (50%).

Repeat Option: final essay (ca. 1,500 words = 50%). Marks for tutorial attendance and the mid-term essay will carry over to the autumn sitting.

SECOND SEMESTER

PH154: Topics in Moral Philosophy: Law, Morality, Punishment, and Rights (Dr Cyril McDonnell)

This module introduces students to moral philosophy through an investigation of two important issues of moral concern in society today, namely: the legal enforcement of morality, and the state's right to punish those who infringe state law. In pursuit of this aim, the module will address such questions as: Should the state enforce a moral conviction shared by many in a society, or legislate against only those actions that do harm to others? Is the purpose of state punishment to reform the lawbreaker, or to deter other potential lawbreakers, or to exact retribution for the crime done? Why are more rights being discovered today? What is the difference between a right and a privilege? How has the concept of rights evolved from the English, American, and French revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries, down to our current United Nations Declaration of Human Rights? Is there a right to revolt? Do animals and robots as well as humans have rights? Through addressing such questions, students will engage in debate about moral controversies of common concern today.

Learning Outcomes

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

- differentiate various meanings and uses for the concept of law, such as the moral law, state law, natural-scientific law, religious law;
- assess the purpose of state law, with reference to its role in morality and John Stuart Mill's alternative 'harm-to-others principles' in *On Liberty* (1859) as the sole justification for state intervention in the lives of its citizens;
- distinguish the concept of punishment from its moral justification, and discuss 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, such as: 'balancing the scales of justice', 'wiping the slate clean', 'paying a debt back to society', etc.;
- describe the main historical factors that influenced the development of the concept of rights: 13th-century Natural Law theory (Aquinas), 17th-century Social Contract theories (Hobbes and Locke); and the 17th- and 18th-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;
- engage in argument about issues of moral concern in society today, taking into consideration the complexity of our moral discourse.

Assessment

40% continuous assessment, broken down as follows: tutorial attendance and participation (10%); mid-term essay assignment (c. 1,000 words) (30%); final Essay (ca. 2,000 words) (60%).

Repeat Option: Autumn presentation of final essay (60%, c. 2,000 words), with continuous assessment mark carried over to autumn sitting.

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

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.

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 the Department's international student coordinator, Dr Susan Gottlöber.

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 Susan Gottlöber, 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. 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%20%28December%202020%29.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. (See the following section of this Handbook for recommended guidelines on referencing and bibliography.)

NOTE ABOUT THE MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTRE

The Maynooth University Writing Centre has been established by the Centre for Teaching and Learning to support student academic writing. It offers free, friendly, non-judgemental writing help to any student, undergraduate or postgraduate, regardless of course, degree or level. The support offered is primarily through one-to-one appointments, where students can discuss their writing with peer/expert tutors. In addition, Writing Centre staff offer writing workshops, support writing groups, engage in discipline specific work and research in academic writing and related fields.

The Writing Centre is located in Room 001, School of Education building, on the north campus.

Further information regarding the Centre's opening hours and specific services will be posted on the Centre's Moodle space. This can be accessed through the Maynooth University Moodle homepage.

