

Information and reading-list for those starting Physics and Philosophy in October 2017

Welcome to incoming Physics and Philosophy students at Somerville!

This letter contains Philosophy-related information and advice about books to buy and preliminary study before term begins. You will receive information and advice about Physics separately.

a) Course description for first-year studies in Philosophy.

The purpose of the course is to introduce you to some of the central philosophical issues, and to help you acquire some concepts and ways of thinking which will be useful for your more advanced studies of Philosophy in the second year and beyond.

The course has three parts:

I: General Philosophy, an introduction to some topics in the philosophy of knowledge and reality

II: The Leibniz-Clarke correspondence, studied as an historical introduction to the philosophy of space and time.

III Logic, studied with the help of a specially written Logic manual available once you arrive in Oxford.

You will study all three of these in your first year.

Logic (taught in classes) is the study of patterns of valid inference, and involves some study of a formal system. Students are required to do exercises and proofs in a formal system, and also to understand the relation between the elements of the formal system and the kinds of inference and argument used in ordinary language. Even if you do not plan to pursue Logic beyond the first year, you will find it very useful in further philosophical study to have some familiarity with a formal logical language and the ability to use it to investigate logical relationships and to understand its use by others.

In I and II (taught in a combination of tutorials and small classes) students are introduced to central issues in philosophy, studied through reading classic texts in conjunction with other writings, including critical responses and modern treatments of the same issues. Part I, **General Philosophy**, introduces students to issues such as the foundations of knowledge, scepticism, the nature of the mind and its relation to the body, personal identity and free will. Part II, **The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence**, studies a classic exchange on the nature of space.

In the first term your college philosophy teaching will start with classes to introduce you to **Logic**, and a combination of classes and tutorials in **General Philosophy**. In the second term you will continue the General Philosophy course and take a more advanced logic course, and in the final term of your first year you will study **The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence**.

b) Recommended reading

You are not expected to have undertaken any *formal* studies of philosophy before coming to Oxford, but your studies will be fast-paced once you get here – so it is a big advantage if you have done a bit of reading ahead!

We **recommend**, before you come to Oxford, that you buy and read

- At least one of the following introductions to general philosophy:
 - Simon Blackburn, *Think* (CUP 1999)
 - Earl Conee and Theodore Sider, *Riddles of existence: A guided tour of metaphysics* (OUP 2005)
- Alexander, H.G. (ed.), *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, (Manchester University Press, 1998)

For Logic, you will use a manual written for the Oxford course and available once you are here. If you would like to consult it ahead of time, the manual is

- Volker Halbach, *The Logic Manual* (OUP)

If you've studied philosophy before, or have already read these, you can further increase your 'headstart' on your Oxford studies by tackling any of the following:

T. Nagel, *What does it all mean? A very short introduction to philosophy* (OUP).
M. Hollis, *Invitation to Philosophy*
A.J. Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge*
Earl Conee and Theodore Sider, *Riddles of Existence*
Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (OUP)
Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*
Antony Flew, *An Introduction to Western Philosophy*
R. Scruton, *A Short Introduction to the History of Philosophy* (Ark paperbacks)
Plato, any of his dialogues: the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic* are especially recommended.

We look forward to welcoming you to Somerville in October!

Karen Nielsen (karen.nielsen@some.ox.ac.uk)

Mari Mikkola (mari.mikkola@some.ox.ac.uk)