

## **Information and reading list for those starting PPE in October 2021**

Welcome to incoming PPE students at Somerville!

You will study all three subjects in each of the three terms of your first year. In June you will sit for the Preliminary Exam in PPE.

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 Politics and Economics 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, concepts, and ways of thinking. These will be useful to you whether or not you continue to study Philosophy.

The course has three parts:

**I: General Philosophy** An introduction to some topics in epistemology and metaphysics

**II: Moral Philosophy** An introduction to some topics in ethics, studied in connection with J. S. Mill's *Utilitarianism*

**III: Logic** An introduction to Logic, studied alongside a specially written logic textbook available once you arrive in Oxford.

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

**Logic** (taught in college classes) is the study of patterns of valid inference and involves some study of formal systems. Students are required to complete exercises and proofs in these formal systems, as well as to understand the relation between the elements of formal systems and the kinds of inferences and arguments used in ordinary language. Even if you do not plan to pursue Logic beyond the first year, you will find it useful in further philosophical study to have some familiarity with formal logical languages and the ability to use them to investigate logical relationships and to understand their uses 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, **Moral Philosophy**, involves the study of an influential but controversial moral theory, with discussions of subjects such as happiness and pleasure, the criterion of right action, the role and foundation of moral principles, and justice. You will learn how to read and to evaluate philosophical writings, how to identify the author's arguments and conclusions, and to think critically and write lucidly about the issues discussed.

*In the first term* your college philosophy teaching will start with classes to introduce you to **Logic**, and classes or tutorials in **General Philosophy**. In the second term, you will study **Moral Philosophy**.

**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 **strongly recommend**, before you come up to Oxford, that you buy and read:

- J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, Oxford Philosophical Texts, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford: OUP, 1998)
- At least one of the following introductions to general philosophy:
  - Simon Blackburn, *Think* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999)
  - Earl Conee and Theodore Sider, *Riddles of existence: A guided tour of metaphysics* (Oxford: OUP, 2005)

For **Logic**, you will use a manual specially written for the Oxford course. If you would like to consult it ahead of time, the manual is

- Volker Halbach, *The Logic Manual* (Oxford: 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*

Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (OUP)

Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*

Plato, any of his dialogues: especially the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*

B. Williams, J. Glover, *Causing Death and Saving Lives*

R. Shafer-Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics* (OUP)

Frances Kamm, *Intricate Ethics: Rights, Responsibilities, and Permissible Harm*

Mari Mikkola (ed.), *Beyond Speech: Pornography and Analytic Feminist Philosophy*

We look forward to welcoming you to Somerville in October!

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