

## SYLLABUS SET TEXTS

*Note:* For the first three weeks you should choose one of the two questions in each successive category and write an 2'000-3'000 word essay about it. For the last week you can choose one of the questions you didn't choose on this syllabus or from a different old exam (available [here](#)).

You should submit the essay at least 24 hours before our supervision. The secondary literature is *my* recommendation of a selection of the literature on the faculty reading-list ([here](#)). Of course, there's more there and you're free to use other sources too. Yet, keep in mind that I'm most familiar with the literature on this syllabus. Also, the order in which the secondary literature is appearing on this syllabus can be used as a guide in which succession to read.

I strongly encourage you to have a look at [this](#) essay writing guide and [those](#) guidelines from Dr Borcharding.

If you have any questions feel free to reach out at any point ([ph539@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ph539@cam.ac.uk)).

*Advice / Rules (adapted from Dr Nikhil Krishnan):*

1. Essays need to be typeset in a *serif* font (e.g. Garamond, Baskerville, Book Antiqua; *not* Calibri, Arial, Helvetica) – *unless* you have a particular disability that requires the latter sort of font. See guidance here:  
[https://macademic.org/2013/11/25/typography\\_essentials/](https://macademic.org/2013/11/25/typography_essentials/)
2. The text should be *justified*; ideally, you should use wide side margins, left and right, of 3.5 cm or more (in Word, click on Format, then Document). This allows me to write clearer comments in the margins. For more advice on attractive presentation, see these documents: <http://www.matthiasbrinkmann.de/docs/layout.pdf>, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~sfop0114/pdf/essaywriting.pdf>
3. Add your name and the date to the *header*. The footer should have *page numbers*. I'd suggest making a *template* so that you don't have to do all this every week.
4. I strongly encourage you to *reference fully* (with any consistent citation system) and add a bibliography at the end. If you don't know what these things mean, look them up, or ask me.

5. Give the *full* name of any author on first mention ('John Rawls'); on subsequent mentions, surname only ('Rawls').
6. Do not use the word 'therefore' unless you mean to say there's a logical connection between what comes before the therefore and what comes after. Distinguish, consciously, between an argument that proves a thesis and one that merely supports it; similarly, distinguish between an argument that refutes a thesis and one that merely calls it into question. 'Knockdown' arguments for and against any interesting thesis are exceedingly rare in philosophy and if you think you have one, you're likelier than not to be wrong. You don't have to overstate what you've achieved in an essay; being honest about what you have and haven't shown is a sign of strength, not of weakness. Don't be afraid of pointing out the flaws in your own argument; if you don't, I probably will.
7. It's often a good idea to state your argument in a premise-premise-conclusion form. But if you do this, think carefully about whether the argument is actually valid.
8. There are many good ways of structuring an essay. But there are three things that are essential: begin your essay with analysis of the question, i.e. a very brief summary of any basic background necessary to understand the question and a restatement of what the question is asking you to do. It's often good to address the question of what's at stake in the question: why does it matter how one answers it? Then very briefly give some indication of where the essay is going (don't overdo this – ask yourself what information the reader actually needs to help him understand the direction of your essay). In your conclusion, go briefly over your argument, but also add a line or two explaining the significance of your answer. The only person who reads your essay may well be me, but you shouldn't write with me in mind. Instead, imagine a clever reader who knows a little bit about philosophy and has read the relevant set text a long time ago, but needs to be reminded about what the text says. That's a good way to test how much basic exposition you need to do before you dive into the substance of the essay. It's also a good test of whether you can take knowledge of some technical term for granted or whether you need to say how you're defining it. But don't worry too much about all this – you'll get better at it as you go along.

I. PLATO: *MENO*

Independent of the chosen question, read first

Scott 2006: Part I & II (Ch. 1-10).

EITHER

‘Socrates responds to Meno’s intriguing paradox with a combination of mystical nonsense and a dubiously executed pseudo-experiment that yields no interesting data, and therefore, licenses none of the inferences about recollection and immortality Socrates proceeds to make – and none of which are necessary to resolve the paradox in the first place.’ Is this a fair charge sheet?

*Secondary Reading:*

(i) Vlastos 1994 [1965];

(ii) Desjardins 1985.

OR

What, if anything, is wrong with Meno’s initial ‘swarm’ of answers to the question: ‘What is virtue?’?

*Secondary Reading:*

(i) Karismanis 2006;

(ii) Prior 1998.

II. DESCARTES: *MEDITATIONS ON FIRST PHILOSOPHY*

Independent of the chosen question, read first these two:

Hatfield 2014: Ch. 2 and Williams 1978: Ch. 2.

EITHER

‘Indeed, that these hands themselves, and this whole body are mine – what reason could there be for doubting this?’ (DESCARTES) Does Descartes present any good reasons for doubting this in the First Meditation?

*Secondary Reading:*

- (i) C. Wilson 2003: Ch. 1-2;
- (ii) Hatfield 2014: Ch. 3;

OR

‘Descartes’s response to the problem of error depends on an implausible analogy between action and belief.’ Discuss.

*Secondary Reading:*

- (i) C. Wilson 2003: Ch. 6-7;
- (ii) Hatfield 2014: Ch. 6;
- (iii) Williams 1978: Ch. 6.

III. J.S. MILL: *ON LIBERTY AND THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN*

## EITHER

'This doctrine is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties. ... For the same reason, we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage.' (MILL) Is Mill right to place these restrictions on the application of his 'one very simple principle'?

*Secondary Reading:*

- (i) Berlin 1969;
- (ii) Ten 1980: Ch. 5;
- (iii) Parkeh 1995 [This is not on the reading list. It can be accessed [here](#). Skip the part about Locke];
- (iv) Gray 1996: Postscript [also look at Ch. 2, 3].

## OR

'I deny that anyone knows, or can know, the nature of the two sexes, as long as they have only been seen in their present relation to one another.' (Mill) Discuss this claim and its relevance to Mill's general position.

*Secondary Reading:*

- (i) Susan Moller Okin, 'John Stuart Mill: liberal feminist';
- (ii) Janet Radcliffe-Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist*, Ch 2;
- (iii) Sally Haslanger, 'On Being Objective and Being Objectified';
- (iv) Rae Langton, 'Beyond a Pragmatic Critique of Reason'.