

Dear MPhils (cc: Richard Holton, Charlie Evans),

Term begins again tomorrow, the most unusual in most of our academic lives. This is a long email, but there's a lot to communicate.

(1) **Accommodations:** I hope very much that all of you are coping with the unusual circumstances, keeping healthy and managing to get at least a little work done. We are aware that many of you are in conditions that are far from ideal for research and will be making every possible accommodation to help you through your final terms. If you need to make me aware of anything concerning your ability to work or access to resources, please let me know.

(2) **Internet:** As courses go, the nature and structure of the MPhil means that we might be able to run the course with some approximation of normalcy. None of you are, to my knowledge, doing research that requires fieldwork, laboratories or trips to archives. Most of the resources you need can be obtained online; if you have any trouble with this, do please ask your supervisor, advisor, the librarian or me for assistance.

Most of you have access to internet that will allow you to have supervisions; if this is a problem for you and you haven't already let me and your supervisor know, do so now. There might be other options, e.g. using the phone, text chatting, extra written comments, etc.

The Faculty has these webpages with guides to online supervision. Please consult them if you're new to using these applications:

<https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/aboutus/IT>

<https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/aboutus/IT/zoom-user-guide.pdf>

### (3) **Changes to procedures**

For the most part, our procedures will remain the same. Two small changes: the submission of your essays will happen via Moodle, and Charlie Evans will be in touch with the details of how.

In the past, a *viva voce* (i.e. oral examination) was required for all MPhil students, and that meant that examining was not anonymous—examiners and students would both know each other's identities. This time around, we will not be having vivas as a matter of course, and this means that we will retain two-way anonymity during the examination process. We've retained the right to request a viva in special circumstances, but we will be ensuring that the result of a viva will either be favourable to the candidate or make no difference (i.e. performance in the viva cannot be grounds for a lower mark, but may be grounds for a higher one). If you have to have a viva, the identities of candidates and examiners will obviously have to be disclosed, but this is unlikely to be applicable to most of you.

There won't be very many events happening around Cambridge anyway, but we've ensured that you will all be notified about any final-year undergraduate teaching that's happening this term, as we're aware that many of you have been attending Part II lectures.

### (4) **Seminar**

Finally, we hope to carry on with the MPhil seminar this term over Zoom (the app most Faculty seem to prefer). The plan is for us to meet this Thursday at 1400, as in previous terms, for a one-off meeting with the whole class. Richard Holton and I will both be present and we shall discuss, as we have in previous terms, an actual MPhil dissertation (attached). You're asked to read, or at least to skim, it and to discuss what in it works and what doesn't. The dissertation got a good mark, but was judged to fall just short of distinction standard.

Given the short notice, I should mention that the dissertation can be read in parts without harming the overall argument. Everyone should read sections 1 and 7. Those interested in the history of the problem can read section 2; those interested in the philosophy of science / metaphysics can read sections 3, 4 and 5, those interested in ethics and political philosophy can read section 6.

You'll also have plenty of opportunities to ask other questions to me or to Richard about procedures and logistics at the meeting.

From week 2 onwards, we will continue our successful experiment from last year and split you into groups, roughly based on your submitted dissertation titles. That will make three groups of 5–7 people. A structure we found worked well in the past was to ask all group members to circulate a paper or book chapter relevant to their dissertation, and to spend the 90 minutes discussing it in relation to their dissertation project.

We realise that some of you are in timezones that make the 1400 British Summer Time slot awkwardly early or late. If that's so, do feel free to propose an alternative time to the other members of your group. The meetings don't all have to happen at the same time. If you are unable to make 1400 BST this Thursday, do please let us know and we'll see if another time is possible (though it may be harder this time given the larger numbers).

**(5) Zoom**

Finally, do please download Zoom and set it up in time for this Thursday's meeting: <https://zoom.us/download>

If particular groups prefer different software for future meetings, you're free to use it. Zoom seems to be option preferred by several Faculty members.

Let me and/or Richard know if you have any other questions. There's no point pretending it won't be a little awkward, at least to start with, but we'll be trying our best.

With best wishes,  
Nakul.