

DISCUSSION ITEMS

For each class meeting where there is an assigned philosophical reading (i.e., nearly every week), you'll submit **Discussion Items (DIs)**. A discussion item is something about the reading you think would be worth discussing together in class. DIs serve two purposes. First, they encourage you to read with a critical eye, rather than simply letting the readings wash over you (as it is sometimes tempting to do). Second, I will often use them to structure our in-class discussions. This means they give you a chance to influence how our conversations go. Find something that you think would really be interesting to talk about and put it on the agenda. Note that I may ask you to introduce and explain your DI to the class, so please be prepared to do so.



Here are the **instructions and expectations** for DIs:

- ◆ Think of something in or about the assigned reading you think would be worth discussing in class. Post it on the relevant D2L discussion board at least two hours before class. (*Note*: I may change this deadline if I feel it's not giving me enough time to process DIs.)
- ◆ Your post should be as long as it needs to be to make your idea clear. You might only write a sentence or two—asking a concise question or expressing skepticism about some claim in the text. Or you might write a paragraph filling out how you're thinking about things. You are free to submit more than one DI, though you will only get credit for one per meeting.
- ◆ Here is a nonexhaustive list of some things you might do in your DI:
 - *Ask a question*. For example...
 - Hobbes makes some really strong claims about human nature when arguing that life in the state of nature will be unbearable. Does he need these claims? Or could he get the same conclusion with weaker ones?
 - Why does Glaucon spend so long on the *descriptive* claim that most people *would* be unjust if they had the Ring of Gyges, when it seems like what matters is the *normative* claim that they'd be *correct* to be unjust?
 - *Register skepticism*. For example...
 - Korsgaard suggests that we have satisfactorily answered the question *Why be moral?* if we have addressed all sources of doubt that we have reason to be moral. Do others agree with this or find it convincing? It kind of feels to me like she's changed the subject but I can't tell why.
 - *Raise an objection*. For example...
 - Foot argues that we should be happy if moral imperatives are hypothetical imperatives rather than categorical imperatives because it means that people are "volunteers" rather than "conscripts," and that this decreases the chance of defection. But nothing about MIs being CIs precludes the possibility of people being volunteers in this sense. It seems like at best the two possibilities are on a par here.

DIs will essentially be graded for completion. I will read them, though, and reserve the right to dock your points if I have the sense that your post is extremely half-assed.

DISCUSSION ITEM AND PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES
PHIL 410: History of Moral & Political Philosophy

Extra Credit. There are 24 class meetings with substantive readings associated with them, and each DI is worth .5 points. However, there are only 10 points allotted to DIs in the grading scheme. This means you can earn up to 2 extra credit points on DIs. In other words, you could skip four DIs and still get a 100% in the class. Or, you could lose 2 points elsewhere in the class but still get a 100% by getting 12/10 points on DIs.

What if I miss class? You are responsible for submitting DIs whether or not you come to class.

Can I turn in my DIs late? Because the aim of DIs is to structure our in-class discussions, you won't get credit for DIs submitted late (i.e., after class has started) and without excuse. If there is some reason you think you won't be able to submit a DI on time, that's OK: just let me know in advance (or as soon as is reasonably possible) and we will work out a fair accommodation.



PARTICIPATION

You're asked to make 10 contributions to earn your 10 participation points. One form of participation is a substantive contribution to class discussion. You may make more than one substantive contribution in a class period, though I will exercise some judgment over how to individuate contributions. Another form of participation is a visit to me in office hours (or a meeting with me outside office hours). I will keep track of your contributions and update participation scores on D2L at the end of each Unit.

IN-CLASS REFLECTION GUIDELINES
PHIL 410: History of Moral & Political Philosophy

Seven times throughout the semester, we will devote class time to writing. I will present you with a prompt and you will spend the remainder of class time answering it. These **In-Class Reflections (ICRs)** give you a chance to practice your philosophical writing. You'll be in a focused environment; you'll have class discussions fresh in your mind; and you'll be tasked with defending an interesting philosophical claim. My hope is that writing under these circumstances allows you to develop the mental muscles you'll use when writing your papers. Plus, ICRs will be unannounced, so they give you a reason to come to class.



Here are the **instructions and expectations** for ICRs:

- ◆ Answer the prompt in a page or two (250-500 words). Type up your answer in a Word document and submit it in the relevant Assignment folder on D2L by the end of class.
- ◆ You're free to refer to any notes or course material you like as you write.
- ◆ The prompt will ask you to take a stand on a philosophical issue we've covered in class. You *must* pick a side and **state your position clearly**. It's OK if you're not sure what you really believe. Pick the claim you think you're best prepared to defend the truth of.
- ◆ You must **provide at least two reasons** for holding the position that you do. I will count replying to an objection as giving a reason. Needless to say, the reasons must be *good* reasons: the sort of the thing that would *convince* someone to agree with you.

And here is how ICRs will be graded (note that .5 points are possible):

- 3 - **Strong**. Your ICR demonstrates understanding of the question. It contains a clear statement of your position. It contains two good reasons for holding this position.
- 2 - **OK**. Your ICR demonstrates understanding of the question, but does not include a clear statement of your position, or does not include good reasons for holding it.
- 1 - **Not so good**. Your ICR does not demonstrate understanding of the question or lacks a serious attempt to articulate and defend a position.
- 0 - ⊗. You did not submit an ICR or you missed class without excuse the day one was administered.



What if I miss class? If you miss a class without excuse and there is an ICR that day, you get a 0 for that ICR. If you have to miss class due to any manner of personal or health issue, please let me know ***before class*** (or as soon as you are reasonably able) and we will work out a fair accommodation in case there is an ICR that day. As always, you don't need to give me any details.

Extra Credit. There will be seven ICRs throughout the term, each worth 3 points. However, there are only 15 points allotted to ICRs in the grading scheme. This means you can earn up to 6 extra credit points on ICRs. In other words, you could skip two ICRs and still get a 100% in the class. Or, you could lose 6 points elsewhere in the class but still get a 100% by getting 21/15 points on ICRs.

PAPER GUIDELINES
PHIL 410: History of Moral & Political Philosophy

Assignment

In this course, you will write two Unit Papers and one Revised Paper. In each of your papers, you will advance and defend an interesting philosophical claim related to material we cover in class. Please note that I will only grade two Unit Papers (even if you write three!).

Mechanics

Your paper should be around 2,000 words long (the Revised Paper can be a bit longer if necessary). Please submit your paper as a Word document in the relevant *Assignments* folder on D2L by the deadline.

Expectations

Thesis & Motivation

Your paper must contain a clear and precise statement of the claim that you will be defending. The thesis should appear near the beginning of the paper and be easy to identify. Aim to make your thesis both *true* and *interesting*. Your paper should also include some remarks concerning why your reader should care about the question you are trying to answer, or the answer you are trying to give to it.

Discussion of course material

Your paper must contain a careful discussion of the course material relevant to your argument. You must explain, with clarity and precision, the historical arguments and positions that you will be engaging. This is not an invitation to spend the majority of your paper summarizing others' people's views regardless of their relevance to your thesis. You should aim to spend less than half of your paper summarizing others' views. And you should aim to discuss *only* those elements of their views that are relevant to your project.

Critical element (including an objection and reply)

Your paper must contain sustained critical evaluation of some interesting philosophical argument or claim. Most likely, this will involve either criticizing or defending the position of one of the historical figures we read in class. In either case, you must provide *reasons* for thinking that the view you are discussing is plausible or untenable (or that some suitably modified version of it is plausible; or that whether or not it's plausible, the argument for it is not; or whatever...).

Philosophy is about *argumentation*; so your paper must contain arguments.

It also must contain an objection and a reply. You should take seriously the reasons someone might have for rejecting your thesis or the argument you give for it. Then, explain why these reasons for doubt are misguided or at least not decisive.

PAPER GUIDELINES
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Additional expectations for Revised Paper

Your Revised Paper must be an improvement on the Unit Paper you initially submitted. For this reason, I will hold it to a higher standard of evaluation than the Unit Papers. You are required to take the feedback you receive into consideration. Please attach a [cover letter](#) to your revised paper, listing the substantive revisions you made to the paper. You must also set up a [30-minute meeting](#) with me to discuss your revision. You can do this at any point in the semester (until the date specified on the syllabus). These expectations are reflected in the rubric below.

Rubrics

A Unit Paper is worth 20 points. Here is how you can earn them:

Good faith submission: 8

Have you submitted a paper that demonstrates a genuine effort to meet assignment expectations?

Thesis/Statement of position: 2

Do you clearly, concisely state the position you'll be arguing for?

Discussion of course material: 4

Do you clearly, accurately summarize all (and only) the course material relevant to your project?

Critical element: 4

Have you provided clear, convincing arguments for your assessment of the material under discussion—including considering and replying to an objection?

Fundamentals: 1

Is your paper largely free of intrusive grammatical and spelling errors? Do you cite your sources?

Wholistic: 1

Is your paper, on the whole, exceptional?

The Revised Paper is worth 25 points. Here is how you can earn them:

Good faith submission: 10

Have you submitted a paper that demonstrates a genuine effort to meet assignment expectations?

Thesis/Statement of position: 2

Do you clearly, concisely state the position you'll be arguing for?

Discussion of course material: 4

Do you clearly, accurately summarize all (and only) the course material relevant to your project?

Critical element: 4

Have you provided clear, convincing arguments for your assessment of the material under discussion—including considering and replying to an objection?

Fundamentals: 1

Is your paper largely free of intrusive grammatical and spelling errors? Do you cite your sources?

Meeting, Peer Review, and Revisions: 3

Did you arrange and come prepared to a meeting to discuss your paper? Did you complete the peer review process in good faith? Did you adequately take the feedback of your instructor and peer into consideration, and improve the paper in light of their comments?

Wholistic: 1

Is your paper, on the whole, exceptional?