



Debates: Instructions

Table of Contents

I. The assignment and deadlines	2
II. Bibliography	4
III. Preparation	7
IV. The debate	9
V. The COVID-19 Taskforce	13
VI. How you'll be graded	14

I. The assignment and deadlines

The course includes 4 in-class debates, during which students play the role of Experts testifying before the “Super Assembly” as it is about to take a vote on an issue. For each debate, there will be around 6-7 Experts, 3-4 representing one side of the debate, and 3-4 representing the other. I will be the Chairperson and everyone in the audience will be a Delegate of the Super Assembly, or Super Delegate.

In addition, there will be a special team of 5-6 Experts, the “COVID-19 Taskforce,” whose role will be to present the public health situation to the Super Assembly, to identify and analyze a particular set of urgent issues and challenges borne out of the current pandemic (social, economic, global, etc.), and to propose some policies to deal with these issues. Taskforce Experts will decide together what to focus on. Special instructions *infra*.

This is the legislative agenda for the semester:

Session	Question to resolve
February 24	Should the state establish a Universal Basic Income?
March 10	Should the state permit marriage between more than two partners?
March 26	Should the state exempt agents engaged in civil disobedience from punishment? (the meaning of this question is explained <i>infra</i> p. 6)
April 9	Should the state open our borders to many more immigrants than it currently allows?
April 16	COVID-19 Taskforce: proposal TBD

The Expert team advocating for a “yes” to these questions goes first. In class, each debate will go as follows:

- Argument from each Expert team: 15 min. x 2
- Rounds of objections and replies from/to both sides: 15-20 min. total, in rounds of 3-5 min.
- Questions by the Super Delegates (alternating for each side): 30 min. (Experts are allowed to address the other side’s answer to a question.)
- Closing arguments: 1-2 min. x 2
- Vote of the Super Assembly: 1 min.

You will sign up for the debate of your choice on **Friday January 29** (you will self-assign to the group of your choice on Canvas). If you already feel strongly in favor of a policy, I highly recommend trying to represent the opposing side—it’ll make you even better at arguing for your side.

One of Veronica’s key responsibilities as a TA is to help Experts prepare their arguments. It is not just a good idea to ask for her help, but it is required for you to meet with her a few times throughout the process.

The debate assignment includes (for a total of 30% of your final grade):

- As an Expert
 - Your preparation 5%
 - Your performance before the Super Assembly 12%
- As a Super Delegate
 - 4 prep sheets 5%
 - 4 short (400-600 words) vote/judge memos 8%

Super Delegates’ job is to listen attentively to the Experts’ testimonies, grill them during Q&A, and then issue their decisions by majority vote at the end of the debate. Super Delegates also write a short vote/judge memo (400-600 words) in which they (1) justify their decision at the issue of each debate and (2) assess Experts’ performance. Needless to say, Delegates’ assessment should not necessarily track the way they voted: they may well find that the side they opposed did a better job than the side they ended up voting in favor of. These vote/judge memos are due within 2 days of the debates.

Here are the deadlines for the Experts in the debates.

Debate deadlines	Read literature and meet as a team:	First meeting with Veronica by:	Submit PPT for review by:	Experts testify:	Self-assessment report:
Universal Basic Income	W 2/3	W 2/10	Th 2/18	W 2/24	Th 2/25
Plural marriage	W 2/17	W 2/24	Th 3/4	W 3/10	Th 3/11
Civil Disobedience	W 3/3	W 3/10	F 3/19	F 3/26	Sa 3/27
Immigration	W 3/17	W 3/24	F 4/2	F 4/9	Sa 4/10
COVID-19 Taskforce	W 3/24	W 3/31	F 4/9	F 4/16	Sa 4/17

II. Bibliography

I am always trying to improve the list of readings. If your own research led you to a particularly illuminating podcast, documentary, short opinion piece, or scholarly article, please let me know! If you found an article arduous and unhelpful, I'd like to know too.

Experts read all the sources below: it is critical that they master both sides of the argument. Super Delegates read at least 2 sources.

The goal of the assignment is not to invite you to imagine how we might apply Rawls's or Nozick's theory of justice to the issue. You are supposed to deeply engage with your topic by reading the specialized sources listed below.

Debate	Questions/notes	Readings (* both sides, ¶ pro, Ω con)
Universal Basic Income	Why should people get a Universal Basic Income? Is it a matter of justice? Charity? Which principles of political morality does it align with or contradict? The economic question whether UBI is viable can and should be discussed but it must not be the central focus.	CNBC - Universal basic income may be 'humane' or a 3 trillion dollar black hole * The Atlantic – Let's Debate UBI * Katharina Nieswandt, Basic income after automation? That's not how capitalism works! Ω Philippe Van Parijs, A Basic Income for All ¶ William Galston, Forum Response Ω Juliana Bidadanure on the need for a UBI for a more just society ¶ Henderson, "A Philosophical Economist's Case Against a Government-Guaranteed Basic Income" Ω DOWNLOAD Paul Cockshott, What is Wrong with the Idea of Basic Income Ω Simon Wigley, "Basic income and the problem of cumulative misfortune" ¶ Stuart White, "Liberal equality, exploitation, and the case for an unconditional basic income" ¶
Plural Marriage	What is marriage? What is the social meaning of this practice? Why should it be extended beyond two people? Is there anything inherently problematic about polygamy? Does justice require recognizing plural marriage?	 <i>Constituting America</i> podcast on on Lawrence v. Texas (2003), US v. Windsor (2013), Obergefell v. Hodges (2015) (12 min) * Jonathan Rauch, No, Polygamy isn't the Next Gay Marriage Ω Elizabeth Brake, "Minimal marriage: What political liberalism implies for marriage law" ¶

	The question of the feasibility of implementing plural marriage can be mentioned but must not be the central focus.	Laurie Shrage, “Polygamy, privacy, and equality” ¶ Thom Brooks, “The problem with polygamy” Ω Pro-side Experts should also do their own research about non-traditional polyamorous families and present in class, say, a happy ‘thrupple’ (real or invented) to put flesh on the argument’s bones.
Civil Disobedience ***	What makes an act of lawbreaking an instance of civil disobedience? Is civil disobedience good or bad for democracy? Is CD democratic or anti-democratic? Is there a moral right to CD in liberal democratic states? If there is such right to CD, what is it based on? Should agents of CD accept punishment? How should the state treat agents of CD?	Herbert J. Storing, “The case against civil disobedience” Ω John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i> (esp. pp. 363-368 and 371-377) * Joseph Raz, Civil disobedience: A right to dissent? Ω Kimberley Brownlee, “ Civil disobedience ” (esp. § 3-4) ¶ David Lefkowitz, “On a moral right to civil disobedience” (esp. pp. 211-223) ¶ Daniel Weinstock, “How democratic is civil disobedience?” Ω Candice Delmas, “Civil Disobedience, Injustice, and Punishment” (esp. pp. 167-181) *
Immigration	Do states have a right to exclude people from their territory? If so, what is this right based on? Does justice require open borders?	Seyla Benhabib, The Morality of Migration * ¶ <i>Philosophy Bites</i> : David Miller on Immigration * Ω Joseph Carens, “Open Borders” ¶ David Miller, “The Case for Limits” Ω Kit Wellman, “Immigration and freedom of association” Ω Michael Walzer, “Membership” Ω Bas Van der Vossen, “Immigration and self-determination” Ω E. Tendayi Achiume, The Postcolonial Case for Rethinking Borders . ¶
COVID-19 Taskforce	Possible topics, which you will decide on and research, include:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eviction crisis - Capitalist hyper-exploitation of the crisis - Worsening of economic inequalities - Racial inequalities and health disparities

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anti-lockdown and anti-facemasks protests - Nursing homes (elderly isolation, vulnerability of workers) - Essential workers - Educational justice - Internet access - Libertarian approaches to public health (laissez-faire/community spread) - Vaccination - Populations in ICE detention centers and prisons
--	--	--

*** A special note on the Civil Disobedience debate:

The Super Assembly will legislate over whether agents engaged in civil disobedience should be exempt from punishment. What Experts will discuss here is not whether civil disobedience should be legal, but whether it should be legally recognized as a special, noncriminal kind of activity. And this legal recognition of civil disobedience would mean that the state would prosecute and try in court agents, but that these agents would be allowed to defend and justify their lawbreaking as *acts of civil disobedience* (i.e., public, nonviolent breach of law designed to call on the government/community to correct an injustice, and undertaken by agents who are willing to accept punishment). If they could demonstrate that they were engaged in civil disobedience, they would then be exempt from punishment (but maybe not from penalty, such as community service—see below). Experts should take time to explain what civil disobedience is, but both sides should agree on the definition (see Rawls and Delmas in the readings).

Some of the readings distinguish between punishment (such as incarceration) and penalty (such as a fine or community service) on the grounds that the former, but not the latter, expresses the community’s disapproval of the conduct in question. Experts should know this debate but they can decide whether or not to address it in their arguments before the Super Assembly. Make sure to check whether the other side is using it so you can be well prepared!

III. Preparation

Reading and thinking

The key is to get a clear view about the arguments on both sides and the main issues raised by the case.

- Start reading the materials accompanying *both sides* of the debate *early*. This way, you will be able to identify in all the lectures from now on, the issues, theories, and arguments that relate to your case.
- Approach the readings by following the 3 steps outlined in Philosophy for Beginners (on Canvas).
- Write down in a 2-column chart the arguments for each side.
- Try and develop the claims on each side into full-blown arguments.
- Think of how the opposing side will counter your arguments and how you can (a) prevent some of their objections by refining your own argument, and (b) respond to their objections.
- Think of how you will counter the other side's arguments.
- You can use other authors we have studied in class, besides the ones listed with your case but you do not have to.
- You should also familiarize yourself with the impact on real people's lives of the issue debated by reading other sources than the ones listed (news, documentaries, etc.). Make sure to choose reputable sources and not to get lost in a mountain of information.

Note: Do not worry about being original. A lot has been written on the issues we are considering and I do not expect you to come up with a new argument that nobody had thought of before. It already takes much effort and reflection to assimilate the arguments and present them in a clear, logical manner.

And as I just wrote above the bibliography, do not make up arguments of the form "what would Mill/Marx/Rawls say?" You are supposed to engage in research about your chosen issue and demonstrate your mastery of the theories contained in the readings.

Team work

Each team of Experts will work together in preparing their presentation before the Super Assembly. You should meet up with your fellow Experts as early and frequently as possible to go over the facts of the issue and your team's position.

- Go over the following questions with your team: What are the main issues? What are the main facts on the ground? What are the best arguments for our side? What will the other side object? What is the most devastating objection to our arguments? What is our best response? What will the other side argue and what will your rebuttal be?

- Next, devise your argumentative strategy, clearly laying out what you will defend and how.
- Then divide the argumentative labor: who will do what in the presentation?
- You should get in touch with opposing counsels to make sure you're on the same page (e.g., the pro-UBI team should let the other Experts know which kind of UBI program they'll defend).
- You will work closely with Veronica to make sure your planned argument is good.
- Your presentation should include some section titles at the very least. If you use a PPT or Prezi, you'll send it to Veronica and me at **least 6 days before the debate** so we can give you feedback. Late submissions will be penalized. You'll email me and Veronica, CCing everyone on the team. I strongly prefer an attachment to a Google doc link. If you send us an invitation to edit your Google doc, (a) remember that you'll need to follow up by authorizing us to access the document (which further delays feedback) and (b) you still need to send a separate email with all team members CCd. I will give you extensive feedback on your presentation and ask you to revise it accordingly. Failure to take into account the feedback in your final presentation will be penalized.
- Your presentation in class must be **15 minutes long**.
- You will rehearse your argument together as a team, to ensure that the presentation appears as a seamless, organic whole.
- You will each practice your portion of the presentation individually to make sure you know it by heart and barely use your notes.
- You will also prepare a 1-2-min closing argument to be delivered at the end.

The Free Rider Problem

If you discover that your group has one or more free riders, absentees, or people who are in some way interfering with the group's effort to accomplish its work, then those of you who feel this way will need to let me know about it as early as possible so we can sort the situation out. Any individual accused of non-cooperation with their team will have the opportunity to respond, but may be denied the option of making the presentation, and hence of earning the points. If your personal circumstances prevent you from being a good team member, come talk to me.

Email

I note in the syllabus that you should always write the course number in your emails to me. When you email me about your Debate, likewise, always write "PHIL 2303 [Topic] Debate [PRO/CON team]" (e.g., PHIL 2303 UBI Debate CON) in the email subject. Always CC your fellow Experts and Veronica *in all your electronic correspondence with me about the Debate, unless you have a good reason not to (e.g., free rider problem)*.

Planning

- Schedule several meeting dates with your team and let Veronica know about these
- Schedule 2 meetings with Veronica: one early, and one closer to the debate date as early as possible

IV. The debate

The Experts are to brief the Delegates of the Super Assembly on the social, political, moral, and, if applicable, legal, ramifications of the question they are about to vote on, and try to persuade them to vote their way.

In class, the debate will go as follows:

- Argument from each Expert team: 15 min. x 2
- Rounds of objections and replies from/to both sides: 15-20 min. total, in rounds of 3-5 min.
- Questions by the Super Delegates (alternating for each side): 30 min.
- Vote of the Super Assembly: 2 min.

Your presentation for the Super Assembly

- Your presentation should be impeccable.
- Your visual support (PPT) should look impeccable too (hence the submission for review ahead of time).

Each team's presentation will consist of the following:

- (1) An opening statement in which you:
 - Introduce yourselves
 - Present the case and the issues on the table (e.g., what is plural marriage?).
Note: both teams will do this—don't worry about repeating the basic facts;
 - Motivate the reflection by highlighting the importance of the issues raised (e.g., describing the difficulties under the current monogamous regime for people in committed polyamorous relationships)
 - Set forth your position very clearly
 - Give a brief preview of the rest of the presentation: who will talk about what
- (2) The 3 best arguments for your position (≠ your responses to the objections, which you should keep for the Q&A).
- (3) An eloquent closing statement in which you summarize your position and stress for the Super Delegates the significance of the decision they are about to make.

You must be ready to reply to the opposing team's objections and answer the Super Delegates' questions in the Q&A that follows your presentation.

Tip: Make flash cards, one for each objection to your position, so you can take a look at them when the Delegates of the Super Assembly push you on a point.

Note: Do **not** directly cite any authors from the bibliography above. The only authors you may cite directly are those we read in class (e.g., Mill, Rawls). Of course, you can and should cite things like legal cases and testimonies. But you shouldn't reference so-and-so's blog post, podcast, book, or journal article. It would interfere with your message to the Super Delegates. The idea is that, as Experts, you have spent a long

time reflecting on the issues before the Super Assembly and you are thus very well positioned to present the *reasons* and *evidence* that have led you to defend one side of the debate rather than the other. So: focus on the reasons and evidence and don't worry about attributing each idea or data to its proper source.

Another reason why I give this advice is to steer you away from **arguments from authority**, whereby you would simply quote an author instead of carefully reconstructing their argument.

Your PowerPoint or Prezi slides

Below is the advice I usually give on in-class presentations. It applies equally well to virtual presentations.

Visual auxiliaries to presentations, for better or worse, are a staple of professional life. It's important to learn how to use them efficiently, and it's a skill you'll probably use again and again in your studies and professional career. Here are some principles to keep in mind—all based on the feedback I have given students over the years:

1. *Your slides ≠ your notes*

- You have the slides, and you have your personal notes. The slides are what you want the Delegates to remember. The notes are the script of your presentation. The notes may be very detailed, reminding you exactly when to click for the next slide, when to pause, the details of an argument, etc. However, you should have practiced your presentation enough that your notes are there for security and not to be relied on too heavily, let alone read out loud.
- My most frequent comment on Experts' PPT draft is: "Trim the text!" Your slides should contain a lot less information than your notes. The slides should include the bare minimum of information. For instance, never include phrases like "We will argue that." Instead, have something like "1. Democratic equality requires recognizing plural marriage"). The text on each slide should be succinct, that is, brief and concise.

2. *Aim for precision and concision*

- Each slide should be as informative as possible, including a clear, informative title (not "Our Position" or "First Argument" but: "Justice Requires a UBI") and precise declarative bullet points.
- Each slide should concisely formulate the central argument without containing much text at all.
- The number of words on each slide should not exceed 100. Always ask yourself whether each particular sentence must be included.
- Keep direct quotes to a minimum.

3. *Make it elegant and fun*

- Polish the slides: they represent your work. Sketchy slides with typos, too much text, or repetitions betray Experts' lack of preparation. Impeccable slides indicate top-notch preparedness.
- Each slide or nearly each slide should have some eye-catching illustrations.

- It's a good idea, when possible, to illustrate the stakes of the argument with a personal story (e.g. of a sex worker).

Presentation style

Experts arguing before the Super Assembly should not read out loud their arguments; instead they should speak from their notes, without reading. They should make eye contact with the camera and resort to a bit of theatricality (through tone, gestures, etc.). They should speak loudly and they should not mumble. Please do your best to do this properly! It will be much more enjoyable and interesting for everyone—and it's a great exercise for you. Very few people are “natural” public speakers, let alone on Zoom; for most people it takes a lot of work to address an audience without [insert your physical reaction to public speaking: sweating, blushing, etc. etc.]. So practice your presentation alone *and* with your teammates. Make sure you are able to articulate your arguments with just a few bullet points. I cannot emphasize it enough: ***the key to a good presentation lies in your being well prepared for it, which involves rehearsing it many times.***

Try to borrow a good microphone and camera if you don't have one and make sure you won't be distracted or interrupted on the day of the debate. Talk to me and Veronica if you find yourself in suboptimal circumstances on these fronts.

NB: Students often ask me whether they should dress up for the debate. That's entirely up to you but it never hurts to look the part!

Self-Assessment

No later than 24 hours after the debate, you will upload on Canvas your self-assessment, in which you answer the following questions:

- When did you first get in touch with your fellow Experts?
- When and how many times did you meet?
- Had you and your fellow Experts done the reading and thought about the issues before meeting?
- When did you meet with Veronica?
- How would you describe your interactions and preparation for the presentation?
- How would you rate your pre-recorded argument?
- How would you rate your preparation for the debate?
- What was your greatest strength at the debate? What was your greatest weakness? What would you have done differently?
- Suggest an overall grade for yourself and each of your partners re. preparation and contribution to team effort (using the grading scale below and explaining how it applies to both yourself and each of your teammates)
- Did you enjoy the experience?
- Is there anything you think we could do to improve the assignment?

The self-assessment counts toward the debate grade.

* Here is the grading scale:

10. Expert organized our meetings and came totally prepared to each, having done the readings and absorbed all the ideas and arguments. Without this Expert, our team would not have done so well. Expert was crucial to our preparation and motivation, and to putting the presentation together.

9. Expert organized our meetings and came well prepared to each, having done the readings and absorbed all the ideas and arguments. Without this Expert, our team would not have done so well. Expert helped putting the presentation together.

8. Expert came prepared to each meeting, having done the readings. Expert did their share in putting the presentation together.

7. Expert came to each meeting, having done most of the readings. Expert had to be reminded to do their share in putting the presentation together.

6. Expert displayed lack of motivation and preparation at our team meetings, leading to a little more work from the rest of us.

5. Expert was arguably free riding.

4 and below. Expert was free riding or otherwise obstructing the team's progress. Debate would have gone better without Expert.

V. The COVID-19 Taskforce

The special team of Experts known as the “COVID-19 Taskforce” will focus their presentation to the Super Assembly on the public health situation. They will identify and analyze a particular set of urgent issues and challenges borne out of the current pandemic (social, economic, global, etc.), and propose some policies to deal with these issues. Taskforce Experts will decide together what to focus on, in close collaboration with Veronica and Prof. Delmas.

COVID-19 Experts will have substantive control and discretion over their presentation and will be free to explore any issues they choose. The main constraint will be to find some philosophical sources. There have been many and on all sorts of issues, so it will be a matter of finding a few relevant pieces around your issue.

Your presentation should be **15-20 minutes**. You should anticipate and respond to possible objections to your diagnoses of the situation and proposals.

VI. How you'll be graded

The debate assignment is worth 30% of your final grade. It includes:

- As an Expert
 - Your preparation 5%
 - Your performance before the Super Assembly 12%
- As a Super Delegate
 - 4 prep sheets 5%
 - 4 short (400-600 words) vote/judge memos 8%

1. Team Preparation (5%)

Your preparation will be graded using the following rubric:

Your Expert team preparation: You and your teammates met all the Debate deadlines (early meetings, responsiveness to TA, timely meetings with TA, feedback on planned argument and PPT).		5
Your work: Your contribution to the team effort, as determined by yourself and your team members.		10
Your self-assessment: Timely and complete submission.		5
DEBATE PREP (TOTAL)		(20)

2. Team Performance at the Debate (12%)

Your overall performance before the Super Assembly will be determined by averaging Super Delegates' assessment of your individual and team performance (subject to my review).

Your Expert team's overall performance before the Super Assembly, as assessed by Super Delegates.		10
Your individual performance before the Super Assembly, as assessed by Super Delegates.		10
DEBATE PREP AND PERFORMANCE (TOTAL)		(20)

3. Super Delegate Prep Sheets (4%)

Before arriving at the Super Assembly, Delegates submit on Canvas an electronic copy of their prep sheet about the day's Debate. The prep sheet demonstrates that they have consulted at least 2 of the sources accompanying the issue (including podcasts and documentaries). In it, the Super Delegates outline the main arguments for and against the issue (bullet points are fine but there should only be full sentences and no abbreviations) and propose 2 questions for each side of Experts.

Prep sheets should be 300-600 words and will be graded on a 5-point scale. *No late prep sheet will ever be accepted.*

4. Super Delegate Vote/Judge Memos (6%)

After each debate, Super Delegates have 48 hours to write a short reaction (around 500 words) (i) outlining what you took to be the main issues and (ii) justifying your vote on the proposal. In addition, Super Delegates are tasked with assessing the quality of Experts' performance, that is: assigning a grade for (iii) each team and (iv) for each individual Expert. Since you are an Expert once and a Super Delegate 4 times, you should submit 4 vote/judge memos.

What to base your assessment of each team and individual Expert on:

- A- Their overall command of the subject
- B- The clarity and quality of their initial argument
- C- The strength of their rebuttals to the other team
- D- The clarity and quality of their answers in class
- E- Their public speaking ability

10 - excellent on A-E

9 - excellent or very good on A-E

8 - some weaknesses in some of the criteria

7 - some good, some weak

6 and below - mostly weak

Upload your Super Delegate Vote/Judge Memos on Canvas. They will be graded on a 5-point scale. Late vote/judge memos are penalized (-1 point per day late).

.....

Don't hesitate to contact Veronica and me if you have any questions at all. We will do our best to help you rock your debate!



Good luck!