

NEWNHAM COLLEGE
CAMBRIDGE CB3 9DF

The Newnham Philosophy Essay Prize 2020-21

The Newnham Philosophy Essay Prize is open to all **girls currently in Year 12** (Lower Sixth) at a UK school. It is designed to give students the opportunity to think and write about philosophy and philosophical matters in the broadest sense, while developing their independent study and writing skills. Through exposure to the type of work they might be expected to do at Cambridge, we hope high flying students will be encouraged to consider applying to the University – and hopefully to Newnham, where women’s history and educational excellence are, of course, central.

This prize may be of particular interest to those either currently studying, or considering studying, Philosophy, but we welcome entries from interested students studying any combination of subjects. Entrants are invited to submit a response to the question overleaf, which should be between 1,500 and 2,000 words (including footnotes and captions). All sources must be appropriately acknowledged and cited, and a bibliography – including websites consulted – should be attached (though excluded from the word count). Up to **five** entries may be submitted per school.

Each of the Newnham Essay Prizes has a first prize of £400, a second prize of £200, and third prize of £100.

Good essays will present a clear argument using specific examples, but beyond this many different approaches are welcome.

Entrants should upload their submissions to the webform, found here:

https://cambridge.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_d0jlQUfoNT1f7g1

The deadline for receipt is **12pm on Wednesday 10th March 2021**. For any queries not answered here, please contact Lucy Rogers (Schools Liaison & Outreach Officer) by email at slo@newn.cam.ac.uk or by telephone on 01223 330471.

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The Philosophy Essay Prize 2020-21: Question

A runaway tram (a ‘trolley’ in US English) is hurtling along, out of control, towards five people who are working on the track. You are standing on a side spur of the track, beside a switch. (i) If you do nothing, the tram will go straight ahead, and kill the five. (ii) If you throw the switch to the right, the tram will turn into a right-hand spur, where it will kill one workman. (iii) If you throw the switch to the left, the tram will turn into a left-hand spur, where you are standing—so it will kill you!

Which of the three options are you morally *allowed* to take?

Which of the three options are you morally *required* to take?

Why?

See Judith Jarvis Thomson (2008), ‘Turning the Trolley’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 36, p. 364.

Judith Jarvis Thomson (4 October 1929-20 November 2020) was one of the world’s leading philosophers, and an eminent alumna of Newnham College. Thomson was awarded a Cambridge BA in 1952, and an honorary doctorate from Cambridge in 2015. She is known for her imaginative thought experiments which provoke and challenge us in new ways. Her story about a runaway trolley has international fame, studied by philosophers, psychologists and students around the world. The fresh version she developed in 2008 led her to change her own mind, decades after she began.

<https://www.phil.cam.ac.uk/aboutus/judith-jarvis-thomson/in-memoriam-judith-jarvis-thomson.pdf>