

*This syllabus is a replacement for the original.  
Although the dates are different, the readings and graded assignments are identical.*

**SYLLABUS: PHIL\_OX 250 01J HISTORY OF WESTERN THOUGHT I**

TTH 1:00 - 2:15 pm Pierce Hall 201

**Instructor:** Dr. John Kress  
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**Office Hours:** M W F 9:30 -11:30 or by appointment.

**Course Description:** Philosophy begins with the ancient Greeks and quickly attains a level of perfection in the persons of Socrates, his student Plato, and his student Aristotle which have been only rarely equalled and never definitively surpassed. In this course, we will examine some of the key works of the two greatest of the Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, as well as two of their most important medieval descendants, St. Augustine (a Christian Platonist) and St. Thomas Aquinas (a Christian Aristotelian). We will attempt to get a sense of the philosophical conception of the world and human life characteristic of the ancients and medievals, and attempt to contrast this with various philosophical assumptions and presuppositions that we moderns tend to make.

**Course Objectives:**

1. To become familiar with some of the fundamental texts and ideas in ancient and medieval philosophy
2. To get a sense of the distinctive character of ancient philosophical thought.
3. To gain experience in close reading of philosophical texts and analysis of philosophical arguments.
4. To gain experience in composing sound philosophical arguments.

**Required Texts:** It is important to get the correct translation.

Plato, *Meno*, trans. George Anastaplo & L. Berns, Focus Press, ISBN 0941051714

Plato, *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom, Basic Books, ISBN 0465069347

Aristotle, Course Packet & online PDFs

Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will*, Hackett, ISBN 0872201880

Thomas Aquinas, *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, Modern Library, ISBN 0075536536

**Course Assignments and Requirements:**

**Reading:** Most of the texts we will be reading are fairly difficult. Be sure to allow yourself enough time to do your reading. 15 pages of Aristotle is equal to 30 pages of many other writers! By the same token, don't expect to completely understand a difficult philosophical text on a first reading. Take your time, read slowly and carefully, think about (and talk about) the reading, and when you can, re-read.

**Position Cards:** Every class, you are to turn in a 3 x 5 note card which should have your name, the name of the author and the reading, and a short reflection on the day's reading. This reflection can be an argument, a question or questions, something the reading made you think about, etc. The purpose of this is for you to think a little *in writing* (one side of a note card) about each reading. I recommend you write your position card at the same time you do your reading (as opposed to right before class). Please write legibly!

**Attendance:** Regular class attendance is both required and important. Much of our best learning is done in class. Students should attend every class, if possible. Your overall class grade will be adjusted according to the number of *unexcused* absences you have, as follows: 0 = +4, 1 = +2, 2 = +1, 3 = 0, 4 = -2, 5 = -4, 6 = -7, 7 = -11, 8 = -16, etc. Excused absences will be given for 1. medical or family emergencies, 2. religious observances, and 3. events authorized by the College. For an absence to be excused, **you must provide appropriate documentation**. Note that the student health center CANNOT authorize medical absences.

**Class Participation:** All students are expected to come to class having done the reading carefully and prepared to listen and take part in class discussion of the material. You will find you get a lot more out of class if you have completed the reading. While it is not required that everyone be equally vocal in class, everyone is expected to participate in discussion to some extent.

**Essays** (2): 1200-1500 words (include word count on title page).

**Exams** (2): A midterm and a final. They will cover the first half of the course and the second, respectively (i.e. the final is **not** comprehensive).

**Grading and Evaluation:**

Scale: Grading will be according to the standard scale of A, B, C, D & F with + and -.

Breakdown:	Position Cards / Class Participation	20%
	Papers	20% each
	Exams	20% each

**Late Papers:** I will accept late papers, but the paper grade will be reduced by **one letter grade per class day** the paper is late.

**Honor Code:** As with all classes at Oxford, the Student Honor Code will be taken very seriously in this class.

Wed, August 27	first class
Mon, September 1	labor day
Wed, September 3	last day for course add/swap
Mon-Tues, October 13-14	midsemester break
Fri, October 17	last day to drop without an academic penalty
Wed-Fri, November 26-30	Thanksgiving Break
Mon, December 8	last class
Mon, December 15	final exam: 2:00 - 5:00 pm

**Reading Schedule:** recommended: Roochnik ch. 3 along with Plato, Roochnik ch. 4 along with Aristotle

1	wed, aug 27	first class. Go over syllabus. Handout: Xenophon on Meno.	
2	fri, aug 29	Plato, <i>Meno</i> 70a-79a, Roochnik 1-6	<b>REFLECTION PAPER DUE</b>
3	wed, sept 3	Plato, <i>Meno</i> 79b-86d	
4	fri, sept 5	Plato, <i>Meno</i> 86d-95a	
5	mon, sept 8	Plato, <i>Meno</i> 95a-100c	
6	wed, sept 10	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk I 327a-336a Prologue, Cephalus	
7	fri, sept 12	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk I 336b-347e Polemarchus, Thrasymachus	
8	mon, sept 15	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk I-II 348a-368a Thrasymachus, Glaucon & Adeimantus	
9	wed, sept 17	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk II 368a-383c The City in Speech	
10	fri, sept 19	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk III 394d-403c, 409a-417b Poets 1, Music, The Myth of the Metals	
11	mon, sept 22	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk IV Adeimantus' Objection, Justice	
12	wed, sept 24	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk V Adeimantus' Big Interruption, The Three Waves	
13	fri, sept 26	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk VI Philosophers, Sun Analogy, The Divided Line	<b>FIRST PAPER DUE</b>
14	mon, sept 29	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk VII The Image of the Cave	



15	wed, oct 1	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk VIII The Decline of the City: Bad Regimes & Bad Souls	
16	fri, oct 3	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk IX Tyranny, Pleasures, 729, the Triple Image: Man, Lion, Monster	
17	mon, oct 6	Plato, <i>Republic</i> , Bk X Poets 2, The Head of Glaucus, The Myth of Er	
18	wed, oct 8	Aristotle, to be announced	
19	fri, oct 10	Aristotle, tba	
20	wed, oct 15	Aristotle, tba	
21	fri, oct 17	Aristotle, tba	
22	mon, oct 20	Aristotle, tba	
23	wed, oct 22	Aristotle, tba	
24	fri, oct 24	Aristotle, tba	
25	mon, oct 27	Aristotle, tba	
26	wed, oct 29	Aristotle, tba	
27	fri, oct 31	Aristotle, tba	SECOND PAPER DUE
28	mon, nov 3	Aristotle, tba	
29	wed, nov 5	Aristotle, tba	
30	fri, nov 7	Aristotle, tba	
31	mon, nov 10	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> , Part 1, Part 2 chs 1-4	
32	wed, nov 12	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> , Part 2	
33	fri, nov 14	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> , Part 3	
34	mon, nov 17	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> , Part 4	
35	wed, nov 19	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> , Part 5	
36	fri, nov 21	Thomas Aquinas, "The Nature of Sacred Doctrine", pp. 3-19	
37	mon, nov 24	Thomas Aquinas, "The Existence of God", pp. 20-27	THIRD PAPER DUE
38	mon, dec 1	Thomas Aquinas, "The Names of God", pp. 97-109, 122-125	
39	wed, dec 3	Thomas Aquinas, "Habit", pp. 544-559	
40	fri, dec 5	Thomas Aquinas, "Virtue", pp. 560-565, 568-570, 575-577, 586-596	
41	mon, dec 8	Thomas Aquinas, "Law", pp. 609-619, 634-637, 640-642	

## Reflection Paper: What constitutes human goodness?

What do we mean when say that someone is a good human being? We often speak of highly skilled individuals as "good at" what they do. A good musician is one who plays music well and a good doctor is one who practices medicine successfully and skillfully. But one could be a good doctor or a good musician and still not be a good person. Try to identify at least three traits or qualities that someone who is a good human being (or good person) needs to have. These will probably be the noun forms of adjectives, as in "A good human being is a human being who is [adjective], that is, one who possesses [noun]," e.g. "wealthy" and "wealth" (these are really poor candidates for our list). Then (this is the hard part) try to say what unites these traits or qualities, that is, what they have in common. The trick here is to come up with good qualities that really are different (otherwise you just say the same thing twice) but also to look for something they have in common (otherwise good human beings would be good only by happening to have all of a list of unrelated qualities).