

# The Philosophy UJCC Alternative Guide to FHS Options

This guide is aimed at helping philosophy students decide on which philosophy options they would like to take for their finals. There is an often bewildering choice, from text based one's like Plato's Republic to thematic courses such as Knowledge and Reality, so the Philosophy UJCC (Undergraduate Joint Consultative Committee) has prepared this guide to provide insights into what the different courses are like from a student's point of view. Each FHS option has an entry written by a student who has taken that philosophy option describing their experiences of the course, including both the high and low lights. Also available to help you make your choice of philosophy options is the Faculty Informal guide to philosophy options, which is provided both in course handbooks and on the philosophy website in the undergraduate section. In addition, your tutors should be happy to discuss different options with you when you are trying to make up your mind.

This document is very much a work in progress and we would love to have the opinions of those currently taking the papers. To this effect we have opened a thread in Weblearn in which people can write about how they found various the various options. Go to the Undergraduate page of the Philosophy Faculty website to find out how to get into Weblearn and then to the Discussion Boards via Humanities-->Philosophy.

We hope this is helpful for you,  
UJCC Chair

### 101 History of Philosophy

Spinoza believed that there was only one substance in the whole of existence and that a free man always acts honestly. Berkeley rejected any possibility of our being able to know about an external world. Leibniz believed that all empty space is imaginary and that every substance is a mirror of God. Locke argues for the existence of abstract ideas, such as that of the general triangle – which is no shape, but every possible triangle at once. What were they thinking? This is the paper where we try to find out.

The paper splits into Rationalists (Spinoza, Leibniz, Descartes) and Empiricists (Berkeley, Locke and Hume) with Kant floating about on his own. You have to answer one question from each of the first two sections so you get to directly compare the diverse approaches that the two groups were bringing to the study of philosophy. Whichever philosophers you decide to study (read some background material and then voice an opinion!), the course is primarily text based and you are bound to read some of the most fabulous ideas ever taken seriously.

### 102 Knowledge and Reality

Whilst studying the history of philosophy is a noble art, the subject comes into its own light when you really start to grapple with the questions first hand- when you are asked to give an answer. Knowledge and Reality is a course to sink your teeth into, one that encourages you not only to look at the views of other philosophers (both past and present) but also to begin to formulate your own ideas and views on questions central to philosophy.

This is a course in Epistemology and Metaphysics, two of the major branches of philosophical enquiry, and provides a basis for anyone wishing to study philosophy first hand through their course. While many of the questions that you will consider have been around for centuries, a lot of the reading is centred on how the subject is evolving today thus allowing you to get to the heart of the current debate whilst fully appreciating all the work that has gone before.

Knowledge and Reality is a fundamental course that underlies many of the options that follows it (it is a Normal Prerequisite for 9 courses) and that, as a broad introduction to philosophical thinking, cannot be beaten.

Recommended texts:

Knowledge: Epistemology: a contemporary introduction to the theory of knowledge, Robert Audi

Reality: Metaphysics: a contemporary introduction, M.J. Loux

Classic: “Brains in a Vat”, Hilary Putnam in Reason, Truth and History

### 103 Ethics

Personally, I had always understood that there were three alternative theories to living the good life: being a paragon of moral virtue, spending all your waking hours at wild parties or just eating plenty of chocolate. I give you fair warning, studying the ethics paper will not help you to choose between these.

You are also unlikely to discover how reasons relate to desires, whether there is any reason to behave morally, or whether we get a choice in the matter anyway. However if you do have your own opinions on these issues, you stand a good chance of reading somebody who has even better arguments for your point of view than you do; as well as some irritatingly good counter-arguments and the odd truly daft one. I certainly found that most of the topics had an incredible amount more to be said on both sides than I'd anticipated.

The reading lists cover Aristotle, Kant and Hume, but the structure of the course is thematic, with the emphasis on issues rather than people.

### 104 Philosophy of Mind

Rumoured to be one of the hardest papers in Oxford, at first appearance Philosophy of Mind may appear to have been designed just to do your head in. It deals with the baffling questions of mind and action that the majority of the population have the pleasure of never even thinking about. What is it that happens between my wanting my arm to move, and it moving? How do I arrive at my knowledge of other minds? What is it to remember? How do we distinguish between different types of mental events? Although at first I found this paper very hard to get my head around because it deals with things at a whole new level to studying philosophers' theories of the universe, it is really interesting and genuinely changed the way I viewed the world. Normal conversations turned into investigations into what people really meant when they said 'I remember...' or 'I feel a pain...' There are topics covered that I found fascinating and that I don't think you can find in any other paper, such as what it is to dream. For anyone interested in cognitive psychology or the technical workings of the mind and body this is a good paper for you.

As a handbook to the course I recommend S. Guttenplan's 'A Companion to the Philosophy of Mind'. A few of the readings key to the course include Wittgenstein's 'Philosophical Writings', D. Davidson's 'Essays on Actions and Events' and S. Shoemaker's 'Identity, Cause and Mind'.

### 106 The Philosophy of Science and Social Science

Our society places a great value on 'scientific progress'; it appears to hold something of a 'trump card' status. But do we really learn new things about the world, or just impose different conceptual frameworks onto that world? You will also look the difference between science and metaphysics. For example, there is clearly some sort of difference between the statement, 'the nothing itself nothings' in comparison to 'water boils at 100 degrees'. But which one is the more useful, or truthful, or meaningful, and why? This paper also asks other fascinating questions about what the best scientific method is and when we should stop investigating and call something a fact. In terms of social science, you will address similar questions - how should we do social science? Should we analyse individuals or groups? And are there any real facts about society, given that individual behaviour can be so unpredictable? I strongly recommend this paper for anyone who's ever done any sort of social science and felt slightly uneasy reading passages about how 'religion determined patterns of consumption', for example. How do you decide if that is even an intelligible claim, let alone true? Also, what is it about the science of our society that makes us think it is superior to that of another society?

### 107 The Philosophy of Religion

Philosophy of religion at Oxford primarily concerns itself with theistic religions—that is, with religions that profess the existence of one deity: Judaism, Christianity, and (if you're lucky) Islam. Conversely, one will learn what it is that an atheist does not believe. The syllabus covers standard arguments for the existence of God, miracles, freedom and determinism, the defensibility of reincarnation, religious experience, whether or not one is justified in preferring one religion over another, the problem of evil, etc. It raises great questions about what is worth believing, and why.

Those approaching the paper from a faith-based perspective may find it disappointing, for the abstract 'theism' is so finely distilled for philosophical purposes that it may not satisfy those who believe specific religions offer more, and more defensible, reasons to the questions raised. However, it serves as a valuable introduction to religious debate, debate which most of us have (or will) engage in at some point.

Useful introductory readings include Brian Davies, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford: OUP; 2000); Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; 1979); and J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; 1982).

### 108 The Philosophy of Logic and Language

The philosophy of logic and language looks like a hard course right from the beginning- the first time I looked at the reading list the topics just appeared to be a long list of words that I didn't understand. To be fair it would probably help if you adored Hodges, wanted to name your first child Bertrand and dreamt about quantifiers but those stumbling across the subject for the first time are just as likely to be enthralled.

In its essence the philosophy of logic and language is a course that gets you right into the heart of modern philosophy, a lot of the topics that you will study had never been considered 100 years ago.

The big names in this subject (Frege, Russell, Quine...) have influenced every aspect of philosophy in the last century and you will find that this subject is far more than a course in linguistics. The link between more "traditional" philosophy subjects and the way that language is used has come to be one of the major points of interest and contention in modern philosophy. You will find the breadth of your enquiries into logic and language touching epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind and philosophy of maths. Don't be put off by the thought of pages and pages of logic- while it is useful to have a good grip on the first year material this course does not introduce anything new in terms of theory.

All in all this is quite a hard course but something that is ultimately rewarding. Usually taught excellently (the logic and language lectures were amongst the best I have ever attended) and with a passion, this course is definitely for anyone with a zeal for philosophy.

Recommended texts:

Overview: *Philosophy of Logics*, Susan Haack

Classic: *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, ed. Geach and Black (particularly the essay 'Sense and Reference').

## 109 Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Criticism

This is a very wide-ranging option, with possible topics including how music can express emotion, whether art can corrupt society, and what it is to say that a picture depicts. In more text-based areas of the subject you can study Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant and Nietzsche: very different philosophers seem to have felt the need to include theories about art within their systems of understanding human phenomena, and this paper gives you a chance to study some important figures whom you might not otherwise have had a chance to encounter.

On the other hand, since having background knowledge of each particular area can be very useful you will probably find you get on much better with some essay topics than others. For instance, being a Classicist and studying the Republic made me relatively comfortable with the Plato and Aristotle questions, and as a philosopher of language I loved the topic on metaphor, while others studying Kant, Knowledge and Reality, Ethics or Post-Kantian Philosophy might find particular relevance to these papers in other areas of Aesthetics.

These topics can be taught in a way that makes them seem quite separate from each other rather than making it easy to see a bigger picture. But I still found this option particularly exciting because it was easier to have useful intuitions about the subject matter than was the case for most other philosophy papers, though I did need to make sure these became part of properly rigorous argument. This could be an extremely involving option if you really care about any form of art and want to discover ways of developing perhaps long-held personal ideas and seeing how they fit into philosophical traditions

## 112 The Philosophy of Kant

The chief question of Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason is 'what and how much understanding and reason can know apart from experience'. In contrast to the British empiricists (to which we Oxonians have such extensive exposure), Kant asserted that there are concepts that cannot be given through experience, because they are presupposed in experience. He asserted that certain philosophical distinctions were necessary for an adequately precise discussion of metaphysics, reason, and any other rational investigation. His discussions of analytic and synthetic propositions, a priori and a posteriori knowledge, the phenomenal and noumenal, his arguments for transcendental idealism, the a priori nature of space and time, all contribute to the fascinating and significant philosophical legacy that is Kant's.

Depending on one's tutor (and the length of one's reading lists), reading this paper may require more time than others. Kant's writing is infamously convoluted, and his concepts can be quite dense. Don't be surprised if you read everything on your reading list and still don't understand—it's a common phenomenon. However, grappling with Kant (even if never grasping) is very rewarding—for in philosophy today, whether analytic or continental, Kant is an integral thinker.

Useful introductory readings include Lewis White Beck, Kant Selections (New York: MacMillan; 1988); A.C. Ewing, A Short Commentary on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; 1967); and Sebastian Gardner, Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason (London: Routledge; 1999).

### 113 Post-Kantian Philosophy

Most people think philosophy is about the meaning of life, how to live your life, and speculative metaphysics. Most people think philosophy is about the great texts of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Sartre and such like. Most of the philosophy you do at Oxford is nothing like that. The Post-Kantian paper is.

The paper allows you to choose two of the following philosophers: Schopenhauer, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. The best way to decide which to choose is to read a Very Short Introduction or any entry in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy ([www.rep.routledge.com](http://www.rep.routledge.com)), but here are some rough characterizations to help you on your way.

Schopenhauer :develops Kant's transcendental idealism, allying it with quasi-Buddhism. Metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics. Influenced: the early Nietzsche, as well as Wittgenstein.

Hegel: furthers Kant's metaphysics into absolute idealism. Metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of religion. Influenced: Marx, Heidegger, Sartre, communitarian thought.

Nietzsche: defies categorization. Certainly the best writer you will read while studying philosophy. Bold and tendentious; merciless critiques of Christianity, 'herd morality' and Kant; strident critic of modern culture; innovative treatment of Greek tragedy and Wagnerian opera; influential views on the point of studying history; perspectival theory of knowledge; authentic selfhood as continual self-overcoming; the Übermensch; the death of God and nihilism. Influenced: Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Richard Rorty, Bernard Williams.

Husserl: founds phenomenology, the method of most twentieth century Continental philosophy. Philosophy of psychology and mind, philosophy of mathematics. Influenced: Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty.

Heidegger: synthesizes Husserl, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, heading back to the Ancient Greeks to uncover the 'question of the meaning of Being'; anti-Cartesian 'Being-in-the-world' revolution in thought. Distinctive writing style replete with neologisms, like Aristotle. Ontology, existentialism, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, philosophy of social science, hermeneutics, theology. Influenced: Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Derrida, Arendt, Gadamer, communitarian thought.

Sartre: Along with Simone de Beauvoir, 'popularizes' existentialism – Man is condemned to be free etc.; develops Heidegger's ontology – not-Being, or 'nothingness' as a condition for understanding Being. Ontology, existentialism, humanistic Marxism.

Merleau-Ponty: applies Husserl's phenomenology and Heidegger's rejection of the Cartesian 'spectator theory of knowledge' to empirical cognitive science.

For my part, I'd advise you to pick at least one of Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger, as they are the three figures to whom the 'Continental' tradition continually return, whether in criticism or in imitation.

The reason that the above descriptions are so unsatisfactory is the very reason why you should do this paper. For one half of the philosophical world, we're talking about modern philosophy itself; and that is not easy to summarize. For the other half, of which Oxford is generally a part, 'Continental' philosophy isn't really philosophy at all, being either literally meaningless or else better characterized as literature. This points to the root of the divide – while the Anglo-American philosophical world has modelled itself on science, with its technicality and wilful ignorance of its own past, 'Continental' philosophy has seen itself as a humanistic enterprise, continuous with the arts, concerned with a series of historical texts rather than a series of problems. (Having said that, there are exceptions, like Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, who aimed to emulate science; and Hegel, Heidegger and Sartre don't exactly read like literature.) The divide is bitter and contested. Why not take a look at what lies on the other side?

### 114 Theory of Politics

Why do you obey the law? Because you will be punished otherwise? Now really ask the question. From issues of political obligation and civil disobedience to the concept of political power, this paper is one of the most wide ranging and critically founded, but certainly never permits a dull moment in tutorials. Prepare yourself for some pretty mind-bending stuff on rights, liberty, justice and equality but after that you have a vast array of topics to choose from and no shortage of contentious issues to discuss.

The paper is easily split into two, the first element, described as the “major topics” deals with the State, democracy, rights and ideology, the second, “political theories and ideologies” puts the initial study in context focusing on liberalism, socialism, feminism and much in between. This is a great cross over paper between politics and philosophy. To prepare, read Gaus, Swift and Wolff, then select your topics with care, you may find there aren't enough weeks to cover your areas of interest.

Recommended texts:

Political concepts and Theories, Gerald. F. Gaus

Political Philosophy, Adam Swift

An Introduction to Political Philosophy, Jonathan Wolff

Reassessing Political Ideologies: the Durability of Dissent, Michael Freeden (ed).

### 115 Plato: The Republic

Socrates: Is it not the case that political philosophy, metaphysics, psychological theory and art critique all rest on the same foundation? Glaucon: I do not understand. Socrates: The Republic is where these major disciplines of philosophical thinking gained shape and have influenced thinkers ever since. In the attempt to define and show the value of justice, these areas are encountered and made vital to the argument. The broadness, yet unity, of the work is what makes it so interesting. The imagery used is famously fascinating, such as the cave metaphor. The paper is unique in that a deep knowledge of the text will be required, as 'gobbits' are done in the exam and to know well the arguments. Is it not clear then that studying it will surely be rewarding? Glaucon: It seems so, at least in itself, but what about for its consequences? Socrates: You must realise that in other papers a question is often asked on the Republic. Thus it can be an ideal

compliment. Glaucon: Yes, I understand, for that is the case with Aesthetics and Classical Political Thought. So, studying the Republic is both interesting in itself and for its consequences. Socrates: Exactly, Glaucon, you learn well. To get closer to the truth look at Julia Annas' Introduction to Plato's Republic, for it provides a good image of the Republic's form.

### 116 Aristotle: Nichomachean Ethics

The aim of a work of Ethics, for ancient Greek thinkers, is to answer the question 'What is the best life for the human being to lead?' To that effect, Aristotle presents a vigorous and engaging work whose primer concern is to reveal the way of engaging in such a life, rather than merely to answer questions on what is proper or improper for one to do. The course offers the opportunity to work on a very wide range of topics and this makes it a very useful background for any further study in the area of Ethics. Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics lie in the intersection of Philosophy and Politics; hence studying it is an enjoyable way of exploring the link between the two. The fact that it is a text based course makes the work for it fairly focused. This in no way implies that it is just about 'learning what Aristotle says'. Nevertheless, the main thing that is expected from you is to understand Aristotle's theory and be able to reproduce and interpret it in a critical manner.

Nicomachean Ethics are, in a temporal as well as in a theoretical sense, the foundation on which many of the contemporary debates on ethics and justice stand on. Embarking upon a study of it enriches one's perspective for dealing with contemporary issues from both of these areas. I personally found the course challenging -yet not unreasonably demanding-, highly rewarding and indisputably worthwhile!

As for suggested reading, clearly nothing could give you a better idea of what this course is about than the text itself. However, a good introduction is by J.O.Urmson, 'Aristotle's Ethics' in Blackwell Publishers, and a very useful and broad collections of essays is 'Essays on Aristotle's Ethics', edited by A.O.Rorty in University of California Press.

### 117 Frege, Russel and Wittgenstein

This was the only paper i did which was about specific philosophers, so i don't know if this holds for all such papers, but the questions I have come across do seem to be more knowledge-based than the kind of questions you might get in Knowledge and Reality, or Philosophy of Maths, where a basic understanding of the topic and a sharp brain would get you through in most cases. However, this is not to say that the concepts are easy to grasp - the chief Wittgenstein text you will study will be the Tractatus, which is about as clear as mud. It is the kind of book where half of it sounds profound and half of it sounds like absolute rubbish, and the hardest part of the course for me was trying to work out what the profound bits meant and why we were bothering to study the rubbish bits. For anyone who has studied any logic, the course is very interesting indeed, as it gives you an insight into the beginnings of the subject, and the reasons behind those beginnings.

Despite what I said above, I think if the primary text for the Mods Logic course was the Tractatus rather than Hodges, then the world would be a happier place. The main advantage of the course for me were its potential cross-overs. Russell's theory of descriptions comes up in the Philosophy

of Logic and Language along with Frege's ideas on language and truth, and Frege's Logicism can be found in the Philosophy of Maths. Even if you are not doing these papers, the fact remains that there is no philosopher in the world who wouldn't benefit from reading a bit of Wittgenstein. His ideas crop up everywhere, and I occasionally catch a glimpse of him peering over my shoulder, guarding me against nonsense and bad philosophy. In conclusion, the course is very hard (certainly the hardest I've come across), but the benefits make it just about worth the effort (especially if you're doing Maths and Philosophy). However I would not recommend it to anyone who doesn't enjoy logic, nor to anyone who would prefer to read a couple of pages and let their brain do the rest.

### 118 The Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein

Why study Wittgenstein? First off, he is probably the most famous philosopher of the twentieth century and an undisputed genius. At the age of 22 he went to Cambridge to study logic as an undergraduate under Bertrand Russell, the dominant figure in British philosophy at the time. After just one term, Russell declared that he had found his successor. A year later, Wittgenstein was teaching Russell. Like him or loathe him, there's no getting around his importance to twentieth century philosophy.

But it's not simply a question of cultural history. The 'Later Philosophy of Wittgenstein' paper is centred around the Philosophical Investigations. The Investigations contains seminal contributions to the philosophy of language, mind and psychology, like the 'private language argument'; certainly you could use this paper as a way of buttressing your other work in those areas. Indeed, this seems to be the prevailing way of treating Wittgenstein at Oxford. While interesting in itself, this strategy misses the point. Wittgenstein's stated aim is not to advance theses, but to teach us how to think. To read the Investigations is to be challenged – by its form, structure, and tone as much as its famous questions and examples. In fact, many of his contributions to the above fields were anticipated by Heidegger. What the later Wittgenstein offers, rather, is a striking alternative to the manner and method of analytic philosophy, a return of philosophy to something like the activity it was for Socrates.

In the Preface to the Investigations, he writes: 'I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But, if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.' If that aim appeals to you, so will this paper.

### 122 The Philosophy of Mathematics

Compulsory (unsurprisingly) for Mathematics and Philosophy students, also highly recommended for anyone interested in epistemology. Plato suggested in the Republic that all students of philosophy should begin their training with mathematics, and many philosophers since have taken mathematics as the paradigm example of human knowledge. Whether you agree or not, mathematics undeniably has a crucial role in philosophical theories of knowledge, due to the difficulty of placing it firmly in either half of the a priori/a posteriori distinction that has pervaded epistemology since the time of Aristotle. The truths of mathematics, most would claim, are immutable, eternal, and cannot be falsified by empirical evidence. And yet mathematics is not merely trivial or the result of arbitrary conventions, but applicable in countless - and often unexpected - areas. The reconciliation of these two seemingly innocent facts has occupied many

of the greatest philosophical minds. (Though not everyone has accepted these claims - for a denial of the former, see Quine; for the latter, Wittgenstein.)

The course comprises a combination of particular philosophers and general topics. Students generally start with Plato and Aristotle, who both believed numbers were abstract objects of some kind, though Plato placed them in a mind-independent non-physical realm, Aristotle in the human intellect. Then not much happened in the history of the subject until Kant reopened the debate, brilliantly attempting to bridge the a priori/a posteriori gap with his distinction between analytic and synthetic judgements, claiming that mathematics was a priori but synthetic. His arguments were attacked by Frege (for arithmetic, though Frege agreed geometry was synthetic) in the context of his logicism (the view that arithmetic is reducible to logic). In the course of defending this logicism, Frege completely revolutionised logic, replacing the old Aristotelian syllogism with the predicate calculus now studied in first year logic courses. This led to the study of set theory and an inquiry into the foundations of mathematics, culminating (arguably) in Godel's celebrated incompleteness theorems.

The course syllabus is very broad, with topics of quite varying kinds. Generally, students should be comfortable with logic and able to get to grips with some complex technical arguments. But there is easily enough on the course for you to avoid this if you're more interested in other things. The majority of students sitting the paper in the past have been from mathematics and philosophy, and they tend to do better than people from other disciplines. This shouldn't put you off if you are interested and coming from another subject, however. The course doesn't require anything beyond the most basic grasp of mathematics. It's probably best, if you've not done any, to avoid the topics on geometry, as non-Euclidean geometries and the revolutionary work in the subject by Klein can bend the mind in extremely painful ways. On the other hand, if you're coming from mathematics and philosophy, it might not be a bad idea to study some geometry - that way you can impress the philosophers with your detailed knowledge, and also, with a bit of luck, come up with some interesting ideas in a fascinating and often neglected area of the subject.

As a pleasant introduction, Shapiro's 'Thinking About Mathematics' is well worth a read. Be careful not to read it too uncritically, however, or you might end up a structuralist.

Questions to think about: - What are mathematical objects? abstractions/ intuitions/ fictions/ structures? - Where are mathematical objects? the human mind/ the physical world/ an abstract Platonic realm? - How do we know about them? from experience/innately/from internal reflection/by stipulation?

### 128 Medieval Philosophy: Duns Scotus, Ockham

John Duns Scotus, patient and intense, and his great successor William of Ockham, clear-sighted and sardonic, were two of the most important philosophers of the late medieval period. Studying their work involves learning how to think within the medieval scholastic mindset, with Christian doctrine and Aristotle always in the background of the content, and a very strict way of setting out argument in a complex series of intertwined questions and answers. This means that this is quite a self-contained option, and that simply working through the texts takes a great deal of concentration. You need to understand fine details while keeping track of where you are in the

larger structure of the argument, and not get confused or impatient with the two philosophers' reasoning. But if you enjoy seeing how logical and rigorous argument can be made – perhaps if you were good at Mods or Prelims Logic – this process can in itself be extremely appealing.

Having said that the medievals thought in a way that can seem alien to us, however, it can be fascinating to discover how they sometimes arrived at insights similar to those of much later philosophers. Studying this option gives you a fresh light on issues whose later versions you will come across in other papers, especially Logic and Language and Knowledge and Reality; topics discussed by Scotus and Ockham include the relationship between words, concepts and objects, and how we tell the difference between seeing something and remembering it, as well as the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. However, the self-contained nature of this paper also means that you shouldn't worry too much about whether the Scotus and Ockham topic will fit in with your other papers. In particular, I seem to have survived without knowing very much about Aristotle.

### 130 Plato: Republic (in Greek)

The Republic is undoubtedly Plato's masterpiece, and absolutely central to his work. It covers a great variety of different areas – not just ethics and politics but metaphysics, epistemology and aesthetics. It's also a dramatic work of literature, and in studying it you need to get used to working with the dialogue form. Moreover, it is essential to know the text very well – there is a compulsory comment question even if you do are studying the work in translation, and of course in Greek you'll need to be able to translate chunks of the text.

Having to know the text this well, however, gives you as a student a great deal of power. Commentators differ widely in their interpretations of Plato and you'll often find yourself able to judge them by looking properly at the text; this particularly happens with Plato's famous imagery.

Having said that, if you're a Classicist (which you will be if you're doing this paper in Greek), you will have to get used to treating this as philosophy, not literature. But this can be a liberating thing – while understanding the fourth-century Athenian background to the dialogue is relevant, this is a paper that allows you to think about the present-day and practical implications of ancient thought more than many subjects you'll study as part of a Classics degree.