

Keble Fresher Summer Philosophy Recommendations

Earning a place at Oxford means that you have the potential for considered, intelligent, critical, and original thought. Whether you realize that potential depends as much on you as it does on your tutors. Terms are short, the workload is heavy, and coping will be difficult if you have not prepared. It is advisable to read and think about the material on which you will have tutorials before you arrive

Prior preparation is especially important for first-year philosophy papers. Philosophy is unique and requires a distinctive way of reading, thinking, talking, and writing. Most of you have little background in it. I'll demand a lot of you in essays and tutorials. I'll offer you extensive feedback and advice. This is the only way for you to develop the skills and knowledge needed to succeed at Oxford. You'll want to be on top of things.

Most important for now is to acclimate yourself to carefully reading and thinking through philosophical texts. Here are some texts which are interesting and show philosophers engaging with important issues in a deep but approachable way. They're also, to be honest, more fun than a lot of stuff you'll read during the academic year.

Thomas Nagel [1979], *Mortal Questions*, Cambridge University Press.

Christine Korsgaard [1996], *The Sources of Normativity*, Cambridge University Press.

You can of course go for the old greats and read stuff like Rene Descartes's *Meditations*, George Berkeley's *Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, David Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* and *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, and so on. These will help you get into the habit of thinking philosophically. Feel free to run anything you find interesting by me or to ask for recommendations on what to read about topics you find intriguing. The most important thing is just to get into the habit of reading and thinking about significant philosophical texts.

Here are some details about the papers you will take, and when you will take them, during your first year. You need not look at this stuff now, but it'll be a good idea to read them before you arrive for the term in question. Read, re-read, take notes, think, and all that jazz and you will be well placed. Dedicate a few hours each weekday.

Michaelmas You take two philosophy papers, *Moral Philosophy: Mill's Utilitarianism* and *Introductory Logic*. You need the following texts for moral philosophy:

J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, edited by Roger Crisp, Oxford University Press.¹

Roger Crisp [1997], *Mill on Utilitarianism*, Routledge.

Utilitarianism is short. You can read it carefully in about a week. Use the Crisp as a chapter-by-chapter guide. I recommend looking at an introductory moral philosophy text. Many objections discussed in this paper come from theorists who reject utilitarian background assumptions. You need a sense of the lay of the land to evaluate those objections fairly. I like Mark Timmons's *Moral Theory*, but many are fine. You can also take a look at Samuel Scheffler's *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, which is a particularly searching examination of what makes consequentialist view like utilitarianism attractive and why that ultimately is not enough to justify them.

You will need the following text for the logic paper:

Volker Halbach, *The Logic Manual*, Oxford University Press.

If you like maths, take a look at it this summer. If not, do not think about it until you arrive and have classes on it.

Hilary You take *General Philosophy*, which is an introduction to metaphysics (what is there?) and epistemology (how do we know it?). There are no set texts for this paper, but it is useful to pick up some background before jumping into it. You might take a look at

Earl Conee and Theodore Sider [2005], *Riddles of Existence*, Oxford University Press.

Simon Blackburn [2001], *Think*, Oxford University Press.

John Perry [1978], *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality*, Hackett.

These introductions will also help with the moral philosophy paper as questions about the metaphysics and epistemology of normativity are central to ethics. You will answer get some familiarity with this material if you read some of those old greats mentioned earlier.

I very much look forward to working with each of you. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns or what have you. All best,

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1. Since Mill wrote in English and the copyright is lapsed, other versions are fine.