Introduction

The majority of students who study Philosophy at university do not have the subject at A-level, although some will have taken Religious Studies or another qualification that includes the study of ethics. The following reading list presupposes that you won’t have read much philosophy before; if you find that you’re familiar with the majority of the texts named below, or require more detailed information about what you might read in preparation for your arrival at the College, contact the Programme Director for Philosophy.

Original texts

One way to get ‘into’ Philosophy if you’ve not read any before is to jump in at the deep end and start reading texts by its most famous practitioners. Of course, people have been writing works of philosophy for 2500 years or so, and a great deal of what they produced is difficult to understand if you’re unfamiliar with what came before (and even if you are!). However, the following are generally regarded as amongst the ‘classics’ of the subject, and although some are more demanding than others they will all reward close scrutiny. The point to remember is that the effort to understand is part of what it is to do Philosophy: if you find what you’re reading either self-evident or silly you’re probably not challenging yourself enough!

Plato, Republic
Aristotle, Ethics
Descartes, R., Meditations on First Philosophy
Berkeley, G., Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous
Hume, D., Enquiry concerning Human Understanding
Kant, I., Prolegomenon; Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals
Mill, J.S., Utilitarianism; On Liberty
Nietzsche, F., On the Genealogy of Morality
Sartre, J.S., Existentialism and Humanism

John Cottingham’s edited collection Western Philosophy: An Anthology contains extracts from the above texts and many more (of which some are contemporary). It’s similarly worth remarking that more or less all the classic Philosophical texts are available free on the Internet through sources like Project Guttenberg.
General texts
The other way to become familiar with Philosophical problems is to look at more general texts. The range here is huge: some aim to summarize the work of a particular Philosopher; others to provide the reader with an overview of some part or aspect of Philosophy (such as a particular problem or period): some are intended to be accessible to those with no background in the problem or period; others assume that the reader is interested in finding out what the very latest thinking is. The following are all intended to be accessible to those with little background in Philosophy.

Blackburn, Simon, *Being Good: An Introduction to Ethics* (Oxford University Press); *Think* (Oxford University Press)
Chalmers, A.F., *What is This Thing Called Science?* (Hackett)
Gardner, Sebastian, *Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (Routledge)
Hampson, Norman, *The Enlightenment* (Penguin)
Irwin, T.H., *Classical Thought* (Oxford University Press)
Luscombe, David, *Medieval Thought* (Oxford University Press)
Nagel, Thomas, *What Does it All Mean?* (Oxford University Press)
Pritchard, Duncan, *What is This Thing Called Knowledge?* (Routledge)
Russell, Bertram, *The Problems of Philosophy* (available online)
Sedley, David (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press)
Singer, Peter, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge University Press)
Wolff, J., *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* (Oxford University Press)
Woolhouse, R.S., *The Empiricists* (Oxford University Press)

The Internet
The internet is often the first thing students turn to when looking for information. Many philosophers have home pages and make their work freely available. Many also use academia, which you can access at: [https://www.academia.edu/](https://www.academia.edu/)