Themistius on Rhetoric, Philosophy and Excellence

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This talk will explore Themistius' notion of the philosopher's virtue or excellence (*aretē*). Themistius needed a clear and consistent definition of the philosopher's virtue: he often sought to prove that he was not a sophist (Or. 23). But his public account varies: he critiques the leading Neoplatonic portrayal of the best philosopher as "world-transcending" (see, perhaps, Or. 21.254-7, 22.265, 28.341, 29.347), but he arguably relies on crucial aspects of that account in his early picture of philanthropic virtue (Or. 1); while he challenges the public trappings of the philosopher's identity, like the tribonion (e.g. Or. 17.215a), he also relies on those (34.14), and constructs his own character around them. In this talk, I hope to make a preliminary start on exploring whether Themistius' works suggest one, single and coherent account of the philosopher's virtue, and whether we can recognize traces of development in that account.