

Phil 11: Final Paper Assignment

Fall, 2015

Instructions

The paper (5–7 pages long) is due, as an attachment, via the “Assignments” tool on eCommons, by midnight Tuesday, December 8.

There are two suggested topics, listed below, but if you want to write on another topic relevant to the course, feel free to do so. It might be a good idea, however, in that case, to check with me and/or your TA first (i.e., even before writing your introductory paragraph and outline).

I don’t expect or recommend that you use any sources beyond the texts assigned for the course. If so you must of course make it clear exactly what you are using and how (this applies even if you don’t quote verbatim). Also: whatever topic you choose, and whatever outside material you may use, it should still be clear that the paper was written for this course.¹

Suggested topics

1. Compare Socrates (meaning, primarily: Socrates as presented by Plato, although you might find Aristophanes’ portrayal relevant for some purposes) with one of the following: Thales, Anaxagoras, Aristophanes, Euthyphro, Gorgias (as teacher of Meno), Euthydemus/Dionysodorus. Specifically, you might want to look at a question like this: if philosophy is defined by the type of wisdom that Socrates has, or by the method (of teaching, and/or of seeking knowledge, and/or of self-examination) that Socrates follows, *as opposed to* the wisdom or method of the other figure, then: what is philosophy (and/or: how can it be taught and learned)?

2. Consider Aristotle’s definition of moral virtue at *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6, 1107^{a–b}, which I would translate as follows: “a state having to do with choice: [a state which consists in] being in the mean [relative] to us which is defined

¹If you have any questions about policies on plagiarism and related issues, please see http://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_misconduct.

by a reason/account/ratio [*logos*], and [in particular] by that reason/account/ratio by which the prudent person would define it.” (In the assigned Bartlett and Collins translation, which among other things is based on a slightly different version of the original text, reads “a characteristic marked by choice, residing in the mean relative to us, a characteristic defined by reason and as the prudent person would define it” [p. 35].) Explain why Aristotle thinks that this definition, unlike, for example, those offered by Meno, would hold up to Socrates’ arguments. (In a short paper you should probably not aim to do this completely, but rather should pick a particular feature of Aristotle’s definition and explain what Socratic strategy it’s designed to head off.)

As a variant of this you could try doing the same thing with Aristotle’s description of the ruling art or science as “the political art” in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.1–4, or with his discussions of wisdom in *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.7 and *Metaphysics* 1.1–2 (though the latter will be difficult on the new reading schedule).