

Phil 11: Final Assignment

Fall, 2026

Instructions

The assignment is due, as an attachment, via the “Assignments” tool on Canvas, by 11:55pm on Wednesday, December 9.

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 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 assignment was written for this course.¹

There are two routes to complete the assignment:

AI dialogue route

Conduct a dialogue with an AI interlocutor about one of the two suggested topics (or in response to your own chosen topic, but again you might want to check in first if you decide to do that). Begin by describing the course and explaining the assignment to the AI, then stating, in a few sentences, a claim about your chosen topic. Instruct the AI to respond to each turn in 120 words or less, with either a single serious objection to what you last said or a single significant comment or request for explanation, evidence, or clarification. Instruct the AI: “You may rely on some of your general background knowledge about philosophy, but do not to treat yourself as an authority on Plato or Aristotle; if I refer to a passage you have not been given, and its meaning seems questionable in a relevant way, ask me to explain it.” Respond to what the AI says at each turn in such a way as to move the conversation forward, supplying quotations from our texts as appropriate.

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

Continue for approximately 8–12 substantial turns (see if you can reach some kind of conclusion or natural stopping place).

Make sure you use an AI service that can generate a shareable transcript link. (As far as I know all major ones can.)

Create an edited version of the conversation, about 5–6 pages in length, consisting of the parts that you think best forwarded the argument/explanation. Mark the places you have removed text with an ellipsis (“...”). **Place the URL of the link to the raw transcript at the beginning.** You may give the dialogue a title if you think of something appropriate.

You must still cite any outside sources if you use them. Also, except for the way assigned, you may not use AI in a way that would constitute cheating if you similarly consulted a human, and you must cite it if a similar use of a human source would require citation.

(Note: this version of the assignment is based on Robert Smithson and Adam Zweber, “Reviving the Philosophical Dialogue with Large Language Models,” *Teaching Philosophy* 47 (2024): 143–171, which can be freely downloaded here. Smithson and Zweber’s ideas required some significant changes for use in this course, however, and they should not be held responsible for my version. Thanks to Tate Krogstad, who is himself doing interesting work on the use of AI in philosophy assignments, for drawing my attention to this article.)

Traditional paper route

Write a 5-7 page paper on your chosen topic. The paper must, of course, be entirely your own work. In particular, AI use is limited by the general course policy: you may not use AI in a way that would constitute cheating if you similarly consulted a human, and you must cite it if a similar use of a human source would require citation.

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 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 dialogue or 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.