

Phil 190: First Short Writing Assignment

Winter, 2026

Instructions

Due, as an attachment, via the “Assignments” tool on Canvas, by 11:55pm Thursday, February 5.

Please respond to one of the following questions in three pages or less (double spaced). (Needless to say this should be your own original work.)

Note that this is not a full scale paper — please do *not* write an introduction and conclusion, summarize other, irrelevant parts of the text, etc. Just focus on doing the above.

You can find answers to some commonly asked questions about my assignments and grading in my FAQ (<https://people.ucsc.edu/~abestone/courses/faq.html>).

Questions

1. As I have explained the text, the first two moments of being-there (*Dasein*) end with the following conclusions. (1) The truth of *Dasein* as such is “something” — that is, a determinate being whose being is identical with some quality (§90). (2) The truth of limit is the “bad infinite” — that is, that any finite something is always altered (*verändert*) into something-else (*Anderes*), but this something-else is itself again something, and so on ad infinitum (§94).

The third moment is the “true infinite” (§95). Explain, first, how this third moment is the mediated unity of the first two: that is, of a being-there which is something stable and of a limit which the something always crosses to become something-else. Second, explain why both the bad and the true infinite are called “infinite”: in what sense do they each involve *limitlessness* (although only the bad infinite is “infinite” in the familiar sense of always going on further)? What is the difference between the “bad” way of being beyond limit and the good, “true” way? (Remember that, according to Hegel, the false is a necessary moment of the true — an incomplete truth, so

to speak. So even though the “bad infinite” is “bad,” you should not try to explain it as a *mistaken* way of looking at the infinite.)

2. In the addition (*Zusatz*) to §107 (p. 170), Hegel apparently alludes to a dispute between Protagoras and Plato about whether the human being or God is “the measure of all things,” and takes Plato’s side (see, in our translation, n. 35, p. 327). Explain, however, how Hegel could argue at the same time that there is something right to what Protagoras says, and that even a finite human ego can be rightly described as a universal measure. (Again, remember: even if Plato’s view is true, that doesn’t mean that Protagoras’ view is simply a *mistake*; it ought to be possible to explain how it, too, somehow expresses the truth).

Consider, in particular, this passage from the *Zusatz* to §96 (p. 153): “The most familiar form of being-for-itself is the ‘I.’ We know ourselves as beings who are there [*als daseiende*], first of all distinct from all other such beings, and as related to them. But secondly, we also know that this expanse of being-there is, so to speak, focused onto the simple form of being-for-self.” Explain how the ego (the “I”) might also be seen as a familiar form of *measure*, i.e. how the “focusing” of the whole varied expanse of the world into one consciousness could also be seen as a focusing onto the simple form of measure. Recall that measure is the unity of quality and quantity, just as being-for-itself is the unity of being and being-there (*Dasein*). Why would Hegel nevertheless prefer Plato to Protagoras? What has Protagoras missed about the relationship between finite and infinite consciousness?

3. One of the traditional laws of logic is the so-called Law of Excluded Middle (also known as the law of *tertium non datur*, “a third is not given”). As stated by Hegel the law is: “Of two opposed predicates, only one belongs to something, and there is no third [alternative]” (Remark to §119, p. 185).¹

In the second Addition (*Zusatz*) to the same section (p. 187), Hegel goes on to say that a better principle would be the following: “Everything stands in opposition” (or better: “Everything is opposed” [*Alles ist entgegengesetzt*]).

¹Be careful: note that Hegel’s formulation, which is more or less traditional, differs from the version of the law one might see in a contemporary logic course, or :) in whatever on-line resource you may have just now used to look up “law of excluded middle.” The traditional formulation says that, for any property *A*, every thing must be either *A* or not-*A*; the contemporary formulation, $p \vee \neg p$, says nothing at all about things or properties, just that every sentence *p* must be either true or false.

Explain why he thinks this is another way of stating the same thing that the Law of Excluded Middle is trying to express. Hint: to be “opposed,” as he explains in the section itself and in the Remark, is to be “essentially distinct.” That is: something is opposed when it is what it is only insofar as it is distinct from something else (as the positive, in general — positive distance, positive charge, etc. — is positive only insofar as it is distinct from the negative).

Why does Hegel think, however, that his way of putting things is better?