

PARADOXES IN ARISTOTLE & PLATO

PHIL 157 – SPRING 2015

The paradox is really the pathos of intellectual life and just as only great souls are exposed to passions it is only the great thinker who is exposed to what I call paradoxes, which are nothing else than grandiose thoughts in embryo. Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

Meetings: TR 11:00 am-12:15 pm
Instructor: Anne Jeffrey
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Location: Walsh 391
Office Hours: T 1:00-2:00 pm
& by appt. NN 244

Course Website: <https://sites.google.com/a/georgetown.edu/phil-157-s15/>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A paradox (“παράδοξον” in Greek—*para* meaning “distinct from” and *doxon* meaning “belief” or “opinion”) is a puzzle generated by deriving an absurd or false conclusion from premises that seem true and logical inference that looks valid. Thinking about paradoxes helps us identify and uproot subtle errors in the assumptions and inferences we deploy in ordinary reasoning.

Two of ancient Greece's most important philosophers, Plato and his student Aristotle, often reflect on and try to solve classic paradoxes in pursuit of the truth. In this course, we will experiment with the same method—thinking about paradoxes raised in the course texts and working through the solutions Plato and Aristotle proposed to classic paradoxes.

COURSE GOALS

The course is designed to help you cultivate the **critical reasoning and writing skills** so you can:

- Identify, explain, and evaluate arguments in a text
- Perform close and accurate readings of philosophical texts
- Provide compelling arguments for an interpretation of a philosophical text
- Communicate ideas and arguments clearly in writing and dialogue with others

By the end of the course, you should have a firm **understanding** of:

- The views of Aristotle and Plato as put forward in the texts
- The rationales they give to support their views
- How views about reality, knowledge, and the good life relate to one another,

This class is a place for you to cultivate intellectual friendships with one another. My hope is that our class will develop into a community committed to reasoning together in pursuit of the truth.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996)
Plato, *Five Dialogues*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002)
Aristotle, *Selections*, trans. Gail Fine and Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995)

CLASS FORMAT

Each class period, we will work through the portion of text assigned for that day. I will break up our class time into 25-minute segments consisting of some combination of lecture, discussion, and in-class exercises or activities (not always in that order, not always all three).

Lecture. Often I'll begin class with a lecture on context that will help you in interpreting the text and understand the motivation for the ideas and arguments in the text. Towards the beginning of the semester, we'll read passages aloud together and I'll demonstrate how to put arguments and conclusions from the passages into logical form.

Discussion. In the beginning of the course, you will be expected to ask clarifying questions and answer questions about the readings for that day and the ideas therein. I'll pose questions to help you evaluate the arguments and positions under discussion. As we progress through the semester, you will be expected to contribute to formulating arguments in your own words and assessing their quality, and ultimately asking philosophical questions and proposing ideas to generate class discussion.

In-Class Exercises. Class time will also be spent on various kinds of activities and exercises to get you thinking about and working with the ideas in the readings. Some exercises include 10-minute writing exercises, question and answers small group activities, preparing and presenting an outline of a passage, and organizing and conducting review sessions.

ASSIGNMENTS

Participation. One of the goals of this course is to foster intellectual community and camaraderie. I will assess your participation based on the consistency and quality of your contributions in class and your thoughtful, respectful engagement with others.

I expect you to engage **thoughtfully**—giving me and others your undivided attention, preparing for class with thorough reading, being mindful of how often and long you speak relative to others, and communicating your thoughts clearly by choosing your words carefully in advance. I expect you to engage **respectfully**—taking a posture of readiness to learn from me and others, listening closely to others' comments and questions, giving due recognition to your peers for their insights and ideas, and responding directly or incorporating the comments of your peers in your own comments and questions.

Writing journal. One of the best ways to improve as a writer is to practice regularly and frequently. In this course, you will be asked to spend **30 minutes a week** writing about the texts assigned that week and to keep a journal (hard copy, digital, or online) of your writing. I recommend that you break up your writing time into small chunks (e.g. three 10-minute chunks). I will check for completion each **Thursday**; you may either bring the hard copy to class or send the link or file over Georgetown Box.

Your journal entries should take the form of a précis of the readings, an interpretation of an argument from the reading, a critical reflection on the significance of a philosophical problem the author tackles, an original argument responding to the author's idea, an objection to the argument, or a discussion of how the idea relates to another view held by the same author. These are all elements

of the short and long paper assignments. I encourage you to use journal entries as a springboard for brainstorming and drafting pieces of your papers.

Short papers. These writing assignments are designed to challenge you to do careful reading, present an author's argument and ideas accurately in your own words and in a clear and organized fashion, and to engage the ideas philosophically. I will assign a grade based on how well you motivate the question addressed in the argument, the clarity of your explanation of the argument, the accuracy of your interpretation, the philosophical quality of your engagement with the argument, and technical quality of the writing. Each paper must be turned in electronically to Turnitin.com (a secure site that checks for plagiarism) by 11:59 pm on the due date specified below.

Short paper 1. In 800 words, you will focus on an accurate and insightful exposition of an argument from one of the readings in your own words. Your audience will be someone who has not read the text before. Due **2/12**.

Short paper 2. In 1000 words, you will defend your interpretation of an argument from one of the readings. You will need to set up the problem to which the argument in the text responds, explain the argument, and provide evidence for your interpretation of the text. Your audience for this paper will be a fellow student from this class. Due **3/19**.

Short paper 3. In 1200 words, you will rephrase, interpret, and evaluate an argument from the text. Your evaluation should involve an original objection or a response to a potential objection. Your audience is a philosopher who knows the text. Due **4/16**.

In-class review session. At the midterm **2/24** and end of the semester **4/23**, you will be responsible for organizing and conducting a review session of the course material as a class. You will draw on material from your writing journals and short papers to formulate questions for one another and prepare answers to potential questions. I will use my assessment of your performance in the final session as part of your participation grade.

Final paper project. The final paper project will require you to exercise close reading, interpretive, and philosophical argumentative skills you've worked on throughout the semester. You will write two drafts of a 1450 word essay on an idea from either Aristotle or Plato assessing the idea and the argumentative support for and against it.

The project has three components – a first draft, peer workshop, and final draft—that integrate and serve the course goals. The first draft is due on 5/1, when we will hold a peer workshop and you will exchange your papers with others in the class. The final draft, which must address an objection or answer a question I provide on your draft as well as incorporating peer feedback, is due on **5/6**.

4TH CREDIT SOCIAL ACTION TRACK

Georgetown's Center for Social Justice provides an opportunity to receive an additional credit for this course through the fourth credit option. Students who sign up with the CSJ and are approved should notify me as soon as they receive approval. The **additional requirements** for receiving the fourth credit are the following:

Service. Students will serve a total of 40 hours, approximately 4 hours per week, with the community based organization to which they are assigned through the CSJ.

Discussions. Students will attend and participate in three discussions administered by the CSJ.

Reflections. Students will write and submit to the CSJ three short reflection essays in accordance with the CSJ guidelines. These can be incorporated into the writing journal.

Final paper. For the fourth credit, students will complete the long paper project and comply with the same general guidelines and deadlines as those in the 3-credit track as detailed above. However, to receive the fourth credit, students must incorporate an experience or something learned from working with the designated community based organization in the final paper. The essay must explore how the experience supports or casts doubt on the author's view or a premise in an argument for a philosophical view held by the author.

ASSESSMENT

Final grade calculation.

Writing Journal	5%
Participation	15%
Short paper 1	10%
Short paper 2	20%
Short paper 3	20%
Final paper project	30%

Numeric grading scale.

A	95-100	C+	78-80
A-	91-94	C	74-77
B+	88-90	C-	71-73
B	84-87	D	61-70
B-	81-83	F	0-60

COURSE POLICIES

Academic Integrity. You are responsible for knowing and abiding by the University's regulations regarding academic honesty. Here is a good rule of thumb: If it's a direct quotation, cite it. If it's a paraphrase of someone else's idea, cite it. If it's an idea you got from a discussion or reading, cite it. If in doubt, cite it. The only ideas not cited are those you come up with independently or that belong to general knowledge.* Plagiarism on any assignment may result in an automatic failure of the course.

Attendance. I expect you to be physically and mentally present in class. Absences, showing up late, leaving early, or working on something besides this class will be reflected in the participation grade. If you have a medical emergency or a university-sponsored event, you may present me with a note from the medical professional, director of the event, or your academic dean for an excused absence.

Extensions. I do not accept late papers. Extensions on papers are available *only if* you make arrangements with me at least 24 hours in advance of the deadline. It is thus best to plan to have at least a draft of your assignment before the due date.

If there is a special circumstance that could affect your performance in the course, please let me know at the beginning of the semester or as soon as it arises or let your dean know and ask the dean to communicate with me. Anything you share will be kept in strict confidence. I am happy to work with you and your dean to make arrangements that will allow you to keep up with the coursework.

Electronics. Cell phones, tablets, and laptops are not permitted in the classroom. If you require an electronic device for a special reason, you may meet with me to discuss an arrangement at the beginning of the semester. Use of electronics during class time without my express permission will count against your participation grade.

* I am grateful to Mark Murphy for this suggestion.

COURSE SCHEDULE *(subject to revision—check course website for updates)*

1/8	Syllabus
1/13	Parmenides 126a-130a
1/15	Parmenides 130b-137c
1/20	Phaedo 100c4-6, 102b-e6
1/22	Theaetetus 143d-147e
1/27	Theaetetus 148e-151e
1/29	Theaetetus 151e-160e, 184a-187e
2/3	Theaetetus 187b4-8, 200d-206b11
2/5	Meno 80d-e, 81-86b
2/10	Meno 87c-97ff
2/12	Protagoras 319a-320c, 330c-334c <i>*Short paper 1 due</i>
2/17	Protagoras 349d-360e
2/19	Euthyphro 5d, 7a-11b
2/24	<i>Midterm review</i>
2/26	Categories 1-2a
3/3	Physics 188a-191a25
3/5	Physics 239b5-240a17
3/17	Metaphysics 1005b19, 1028b4-1030a12
3/19	Metaphysics 1032b1-1033a7 <i>*Short paper 2 due</i>
3/24	De Anima 412a17-413a7
3/26	De Anima 418a3-6, 424a17-21, 429a-432a1
3/31	Posterior Analytics TBD
4/7	Posterior Analytics TBD
4/9	Nicomachean Ethics 1094a1-1100a10
4/14	Nicomachean Ethics 1102a5-1109b30
4/16	Nicomachean Ethics 1113b5-1114b25, 1140a25-1152a35 <i>*Short paper 3 due</i>
4/21	Nicomachean Ethics TBD
4/23	<i>Final review</i>
5/1	<i>Peer Workshop *Final paper draft due</i>
5/6	<i>*Final paper due</i>