

PHILOSOPHY 100

Spring 2026

1st Essay Assignment

Due Tuesday, February 24

All papers must be properly word processed or typed with 1" margins on the top, sides and bottom. Use double-spacing and no larger than 12pt font. Turn in by uploading to Lamakū as a pdf file. Use the following format to title your file: lastname Phil 100 #1. Do not use AI to do this assignment. I want to see references to the texts provided on the website. If you use external references I will be suspicious that you have used AI. The idea is for you to show understanding and thoughtful reflections on the texts provided on the website.

Write a 3-4 page essay on one of the following topics. Your essay should show an adequate understanding of the philosophy, evidence that you have read the relevant texts, and some reflection about what you think of this philosophy and its relevance today.

The Love of Wisdom

At the beginning of the *Apology*, why did Socrates tell the story about the oracle at Delphi's pronouncement that Socrates is the wisest? What is the key to Socrates's wisdom? Why does Socrates think the love of wisdom is so important that he says "the unexamined life is not worth living"? To what extent do you think Socrates is right about the importance of the love of wisdom?

The Myth of the Cave

Explain how Socrates's story of the Myth of the Cave in the *Republic* illustrates Plato's philosophy, both his metaphysics and epistemology. How does Plato's philosophy contrast with the Sophists' view that is summed up in Protagoras' statement that "Man is the measure of all things"? To what extent would you agree more with Plato or Protagoras?

Enlightenment in Indian Philosophy

What is the difference between the Hindu notion of enlightenment, *moksha*, expressed in the story about the secret Naciketas learns from Yama, the god of Death in the *Katha Upanishad* and the Buddhist notion of enlightenment, *nirvana*, that is expressed in the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths? What is the point of the Buddha's teaching in *The Fire Sermon*? How is the discipline of yoga and meditation crucial for attaining enlightenment in both traditions of Indian Philosophy. What do you think of these different notions of enlightenment in Indian Philosophy?

The Dao in Chinese Philosophy

What is the difference between the Confucian and the Daoist understanding of the *Dao*? What is meant by the Confucian notion of the *junzi* and what are some of the virtues of the *junzi*? How did the Daoist philosophers challenge the Confucian view and what recommendations did they make in aligning with the *Dao*? What is meant by the polarities of *yin* and *yang* in Chinese philosophy and why do the Daoist texts emphasize the *yin* so much? To what extent are the teachings of Confucianism and Daoism relevant for us today?

Zen Buddhism

What is meant by the Mahayana Buddhist teaching of emptiness (*shunyata*) that is expressed in *The Heart Sutra*? How are the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism and Daoism brought together in the development of the tradition of Chan/Zen Buddhism, in the Chan texts of Bodhidharma's *Bloodstream Sermon*, or the *Platform Sutra* of Hui-neng, and in the Zen writings of Dōgen or Shunryu Suzuki? What do you think of the Zen notion of enlightenment?

Grading Rubric

1) Writing 20%

Grammar, spelling, composition, and style. Your essay should be well organized. There should be an introduction, development of a theme, and a conclusion.

2) Philosophical Content 50%

The essay should reflect an adequate understanding of the texts. Your exposition of the text should include *at least two quotations* from the primary text material. All quotes should be properly marked within the text and must include a reference to the text cited.

3) Commentary 30%

Your own thoughtful reflections on the topic.

Handling Citations

There are a number of ways of handling citations in your papers. One could just use footnotes or endnotes. An example of using footnotes is like the following: According to Socrates, “the unexamined life is not worth living.”¹ If you are citing the same text a number of times you can also just include the text reference in the sentence like this: According to Socrates, “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Plato 2000, 38a). Notice the format of the punctuation here. The period goes after the text reference—otherwise the reference is stuck in no-sentence-land between two sentences. If you use this format then you would have to include the text information, which otherwise was included in the footnote, in a bibliography at the end of your paper. Notice the difference in format of the footnote and bibliography. The difference between footnote and bibliography format is not as clear in citing Plato, since he has only one name. Let’s say I wanted to cite our textbook where Magee finds it “doubtful whether any philosopher has had more influence than Socrates.”² If I wanted to include the text reference in the sentence it would look like this: Magee finds it “doubtful whether any philosopher has had more influence than Socrates” (Magee 2001, 23). Then, of course, the reference information goes into a bibliography.

Now let’s say you want to cite a longer quotation. In order to save valuable space, you could then indent the quote and use single spacing. What seems most outrageous is that Socrates refuses to simply just shut up, which might perhaps have been enough of a counter-penalty to save his life. Socrates, however, has a good reason for this:

Now this is the most difficult point on which to convince some of you. If I say that it is impossible for me to keep quiet because that means disobeying the god, you will not believe me and will think

¹Plato, *The Apology*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: from Thales to Aristotle*, 2nd. ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 38a.

²Bryan Magee, *The Story of Philosophy: A Concise Introduction to the World’s Greatest Thinkers and Their Ideas* (London: Dorling Kindersley Limited, 2001), 23.

Notice in a footnote, first name comes first followed by last name, then the title of the text, and then publisher information (Location: Publisher, publishing date) comes in parentheses.

I am being ironical. On the other hand, if I say that it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for man, you will believe me even less. (Plato 2000, 37e-38a)

You could, of course, use a footnote for this citation. If you include the reference within the body of the text as illustrated above, then note the difference in punctuation here as opposed to the earlier example. Notice here you don't use quotation marks around the citation because it is obvious what is being cited. Also, the text reference stands outside the period of the last sentence. Here are examples of bibliographic entries:

Bibliography

Magee, Bryan. 2001. *The Story of Philosophy: A Concise Introduction to the World's Greatest Thinkers and Their Ideas*. London: Dorling Kindersley Limited.

Plato. 2000. *The Apology*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, in *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy: from Thales to Aristotle*, 2nd. ed. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Notice in a bibliography the last name goes first, then a comma followed by first name. Then a period and then year of publication, then the title of the text. Always use italics or underline whenever referring to the title of a book. Notice there are no parentheses in a bibliographic entry. Bibliographies are organized alphabetically.