PHIL 451/551: VIRTUE, JUSTICE, AND THE GOOD IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Reading Plato's Gorgias

DAMIEN STOREY | FALL 2020 | VERSION 0.2

WHEN: MO/WE/FR 11.00 – 11.50

Important: *this is a beta version of the syllabus, which means: (a) there are many gaps (e.g. much of the reading hasn't been added yet) and (b) some aspects of the course might change, such as the assessment methods. Be sure that you always have the latest version of this document (check the version number above).*

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COURSE PARTICULARS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we will read through Plato's *Gorgias*, while keeping an eye on contemporary scholarly debates. The *Gorgias* is one of Plato's most dramatic dialogues, both in its philosophy and in the way it presents its characters—especially Callicles, Socrates most fiery adversary.

The dialogue's topic is ostensibly oratory, and thus the life of both politicians and the citizens who are under their influence. The formal power of the Athenian democracy was held by collective bodies, such as the assembly or courts, made up of a large number of citizens with equal authority. In this capacity, members could only enjoy 'power' in the sense that they are a drop in a powerful river. Personal, non-collective power lay with those who could change the river's course by swaying popular opinion—orators. With respect to power, then, a successful orator can be seen as the democratic analogue of the tyrant and it is for this near-tyrannical power—getting whatever one desires—that the dialogue's three interlocutors, Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, praise oratory.

The topic of oratory leads Socrates to two major clashes with these interlocutors, both of which introduce a central theme in Platonic philosophy:

Pleasure *versus* virtue. For Callicles, the best life is the one that has the greatest share of life's luxuries without fear of reprisal: the life of an orator or, even better, tyrant. Socrates, in contrast, argues for the supreme value of virtue: even a person who suffers grave injustice at the hand of a tyrant is happier than a tyrant who commits these injustices, he argues.

Persuasion *versus* truth. Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles disregard the distinction between appearances and reality: for them, what appears so, is so. This use of plausible appearances is how the orator persuades his audience, and it is, ultimately, what guides the orator's own view of the best life. Socrates counters that appearance and reality rarely coincide when it comes to what is good or bad, and the 'reasoning' of the orator—whether she's persuading herself or an audience—ultimately leads to the worst kind of life; for the best life, one needs philosophy.

HOW TO CONTACT ME

Office hours: Wed 2–4 | *Office:* THE INTERNET | *Email:* dstorey@ku.edu.tr

I'm always happy to answer questions by email. And I can usually make time to see students in my office or via video conference—drop by my office or send me an email to arrange a meeting.

Please always refer to me as 'Damien', whether in person or by email. Please never call me Dr. Storey, and certainly not Mr. Storey (I'm not a bank manager).

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

This is a 400/500-level course that is closer to a research seminar than a lecture. Every student must to do the weekly reading carefully. I will ensure that the reading is both interesting and not too burdensome. On average, each week I expect there to be chunk of Plato to study and one article. If this sounds like too much, this course is not for you.

Students are expected to practice independent research skills. Minimally, this means that you can find an article (i.e. you don't need me to spoon feed all the reading to you by putting it on Blackboard). More substantially, this means being able to find relevant and high quality research articles without a reading list from me (as you'll be expected to for the final weeks of this course).

ASSESSMENT METHODS

For *undergraduates*, the course is assessed by:

1. (25%) *Paper prep.* In the last few weeks of the class, students will (either individually or in a group) choose a relevant scholarly article, give a 10–15 minute presentation to the class, and answer questions on it. (*Grading.* Letter grade, F to A+.)
2. (25%) *Essay 1.* Between 1000–1500 words, on a topic you choose after discussion with me. (*Grading.* Letter grade, F to A+.)
3. (50%) *Essay 2.* Between 2000–2500 words, on a topic you choose after discussion with me. (*Grading.* Letter grade, F to A+.) The second essay can be a *substantial* rewrite of the first essay, but only if the grade improves by around one full letter grade.
4. *Reading skills.* Full marks require decent comprehension of most week's reading. This means that for *each week* you must: (a) attend at least one lecture, (b) have done the reading, and (c) demonstrate a reasonable understanding of the reading (even if it is difficult). You can fail reading comprehension in three weeks; after that, you lose 1/3 of your overall letter grade per failure. (Note that this applies per *week*: you still pass, then, if you fail to understand the reading in the first lecture, but have a better understanding in the second.)

For *graduates*, the course is assessed by:

1. (25%) *Paper prep.* You will each choose a relevant scholarly article, give a 10–15 minute presentation to the class, and answer questions on it. (*Grading.* Letter grade, F to A+.)
2. (25%) *Essay 1.* Between 3000 and 5000 words, on a topic you choose after discussion with me. (*Grading.* Letter grade, F to A+.)
3. (50%) *Essay 2.* Between 4500 and 6500 words, on a topic you choose after discussion with me. (*Grading.* Letter grade, F to A+.) The second essay can be a *substantial* rewrite of the first essay, but only if the grade improves by at least one full letter grade.

A+	——	Exceptional
A	4.00	Superior
A–	3.70	Above Average
B+	3.30	Above Average
B	3.00	Average
B–	2.70	Average
C+	2.30	Below Average
C	2.00	Below Average
C–	1.70	Borderline
D+	1.30	Deficient
D	1.00	Deficient
F	0.00	Failing

COURSE POLICIES

Course material. All required reading will be on Blackboard at least a week prior to the relevant lecture. Optional reading will *not* usually be on BB, but both the library and the internet exist.

Late work. Late essays, if accepted, will lose marks at the rate of one full letter grade per week (e.g. a B– essay will get a C– if it is two days late and a D– if it is ten days late). Tasks will be marked as failed if they are later than the lecture for which they are due.

Extensions and exemptions. Extensions and exemptions are possible (though not guaranteed) if *both* of two conditions are met: (a) they are for official academic or medical reasons (with appropriate documentation) and (b) I am made aware of the request *before* the due date.

Assessments and grades. All students have the opportunity to attempt the same work load and their final grade reflects the academic merit of the work they produce. Students cannot achieve grades in any other way.

Referencing and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's work without acknowledgement, such that someone might reasonably mistake it for your own work. The university's guidelines are here. Plagiarism is a *very* serious offence even if it is just a couple of lines and *even if it is accidental*: it is entirely *your* responsibility to learn what plagiarism is. If you are caught plagiarising, the minimum you can expect, in mild cases, is failing the plagiarised component, but in most cases you will receive an F for the entire course and be reported for academic misconduct. If you're in any way unsure about plagiarism, please ask me.

GENERAL READING

First and foremost, read the *Gorgias*. There are plenty of copies of the *Gorgias* in the campus bookshop and library. But be sure to check your translation with me. Good translations with helpful commentaries include Terence Irwin (Clarendon Press) and E. R. Dodds (OUP).

I strongly advise you to read Plato's *Gorgias* at least once—ideally, multiple times—*before* the first lecture.

Collections that give some background to Plato include:

- Hugh Benson (ed.) *A Companion to Plato* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006)
- Richard Kraut (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992)

You can find many useful Stanford Encyclopaedia articles, including:

- Charles L. Griswold, 'Plato on Rhetoric and Poetry' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- Dorothea Frede, 'Plato's Ethics: An Overview' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- C.C.W. Taylor and Mi-Kyoung Lee, 'The Sophists' in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

LECTURE OUTLINE

BACKGROUND.

0.1 What are orators and sophists?
Week 1: Lecture 1 & 2

- Read the syllabus fully and carefully.
- Josiah Ober, 'Orators' in Christopher Rowe & Malcolm Schofield (eds) *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought* (CUP: Cambridge, 2008)
- John Gibert, 'The Sophists' in Christopher Shields (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Ancient Philosophy* (Blackwell, 2003)

PART 1: GORGIAS (447A–461B)

1.1 What is oratory?
Week 2: Lecture 3 & 4

- *Gorgias* 447A–455A
- Debra Nails's entries on Gorgias, Polus, & Callicles

1.2 The power of oratory / Does an orator teach justice?
Week 3: Lecture 5 & 6

- *Gorgias* 455A–461B
- The Friday Article 1

PART 2: POLUS (461B–481B)

2.1 Socrates: oratory is part of the 'knack' of flattery.
Week 4: Lecture 7 & 8

- *Gorgias* 461B–466A

2.2 Oratory, power, and desire.
Week 5: Lecture 9 & 10

- *Gorgias* 466A–468E
- The Friday Article 2

2.3 Is doing injustice better than suffering it?
Week 6: Lecture 11 & 12

- *Gorgias* 468E–481B

PART 3: CALLICLES (481C–527E)

3.1 Callicles' interuption: might-is-right.

Week 7: Lecture 13 & 14

- *Gorgias* 481B–488B
- The Friday Article 3

3.2 Socrates' rebuttal: refining Callicles' position / The pleasant *vs.* the good

Week 8: Lecture 15 & 16

- *Gorgias* 488B–500A

3.3 Virtue, art, flattery, and the good *vs.* the apparent good

Week 9: Lecture 17 & 18

- *Gorgias* 500A–527E
- The Friday Article 4

STUDENT-FOUND PAPERS

4.1 Paper 1

Week 10: Lecture 19 & 20

4.2 Paper 2

Week 11: Lecture 21 & 22

4.3 Paper 3

Week 12: Lecture 23 & 24

4.4 Paper 4

Week 13: Lecture 25 & 26

4.5 Paper 5

Week 14: Lecture 27 & 28

SOME ESSAY & WRITING ADVICE

WRITING PHILOSOPHY

Please pay close attention to the following advice, especially 1 and 2. They try to cater for the most common and most easily solved problems I find in students' writing. Please take them seriously.

1. *Explain*. In short: explain *everything*. It should be possible for an intelligent peer who hasn't studied philosophy to *fully* understand your essay without needing to read the authors you're writing about. For example: if you use a technical term that has particular significance for an author, make sure you clearly define it. Similarly, for any argument or position you discuss, you must clearly and fully explain it to your reader. This is partly because good academic writing should be explicit and easily understood, but it is also because your ability to explain the ideas you're discussing—clearly, precisely, and succinctly—is what you're being assessed on. Your readers, inclusing your grader, know that you understand something only if, and to the extent that, you've succesfully explained it. Don't expect anyone to just assume you understand something that you've failed to explain. You might well know, for example, what a categorical imperative is, but you need to *show* that you know it and how precisely you know it. Explaining even small, simple ideas well is a lot harder than you might think; don't underestimate how important it is, and how much work it takes.

2. *Justify*. Assume that for every claim you make, the reader is asking 'why on earth should I believe that?' In a philosophy essay, there should always be an excellent answer to this question. You should consider this to be, above all else, your aim when writing an essay. The worst thing you can do is to make bold assertions without defending them, and the second worst is to make bold assertions and defend them weakly. Note that this includes interpretive claims: if you write 'Plato believes that p', you need to show your reader, perhaps by giving a supporting quote, that this is indeed something Plato believes.

   A bad essay: 'p!'
   A good essay: 'For reasons x, y, and z, it seems that p.'
   An excellent essay: 'Reasons x, y, and z give us good grounds for thinking that p, although someone might offer an objection along the following lines ... However, I think there is a promising response to this objection ...'

3. *Use headings*. Before you start writing, sketch a structure for your essay. When writing, use headings that reflect this structure. A typical essay might have 2–4 headings.

4. *First understand, then assess*. Be careful not to rush into criticisms of what you read before you've fully understood it. Approach everything you read with charity. That is, assume that the author has thought intelligently and carefully about what they've written, so is unlikely to have made obvious mistakes. For example, if you notice a *prima facie* objection to something you're reading, read it again carefully to see if there's a way

to understand it that avoids the objection or try to think of a plausible implicit assumption the author might have made that caters for the objection.

5. *Be sufficiently detailed*. The topics you'll consider are broad. Someone could write hundreds of pages about them, but you have at most a few pages. This presents a challenge: on the one hand, you want to show that you're familiar with the whole topic; on the other hand, you want to do more than simply scratch the surface, never looking at any one issue in detail. This can be a difficult balance to achieve, but in general it is much better to *err on the side of detail*. One approach might be to devote about the first third of your essay to a more general introduction of the topic and then use the last two-thirds to examine one or two smaller points in much greater detail—you might, for example, focus on *one* argument, premise, or objection that you think is especially important or interesting.

6. *Ensure your conclusions reflect your arguments*. You might have been taught that strong, persuasive prose requires confident assertions, rather than hesitant, qualified ones. But in philosophy your assertions should reflect the actual degree of confidence that is warranted by the evidence you've provided. Decisive arguments are rare—even rarer are decisive arguments in just a few lines of a student's essay. So be careful not to mistake considerations that give us a good reason for believing that p for an argument that shows conclusively that p. A good essay is likely to have a large range of (appropriate) qualifying phrases: 'this shows decisively that p'; 'this is a strong reason to believe that p'; 'this suggests that p'; 'this makes it less implausible that p'; and so forth. Be especially careful with strong success verbs like 'refutes', 'proves', or 'shows'.

7. *Show 'independence of thought' rather than 'originality'.* You might think that philosophy encourages you to express your own unique opinions, ones different from those of the authors you read. But originality—the simply fact that an idea is new—has little value by itself and it should not be your aim. After all, an idea can be both original and obviously false. What *has* value is independence of thought. For example, if you agree with the conclusions of a certain author because you fully understand them, have thought critically about their arguments, and carefully assessed alternative possibilities, then you believe nothing original, but you are showing admirable independence of thought.

8. *Use quotes correctly*. Especially in historical subjects, including quotes from relevant primary texts can be an excellent way to illustrate, justify, and give some focus to your discussion. One way (of many) to use a quote is the following: make a claim; present a quote that supports the claim; and then explain and interpret the text of the quote in order to *show* that and why it supports your claim. But two cautions: first, quotes from secondary sources are rarely useful; second, *never use a quote as a way of saying something*—rather, a quote should be presented as evidence *about which* you have something to say.

For more guides to essay writing, see Jim Pryor, Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Essay, and James Lenman, How to Write A Crap Philosophy Essay.

The following are a few typographic conventions worth learning.

1. *Indent paragraphs.* But do not indent the opening paragraph of the document or the first paragraph after a section heading. You may instead—not in addition—separate paragraphs with a blank line, although this is better suited to list-like texts, such as legal documents, than continuous prose.
2. *Use single line spacing.* It's easier to read. Double spacing is only necessary when a printed copy of you work will be annotated.
3. *A footnote mark is always placed after punctuation.*[1] It is almost always best to place a footnote at the end of the sentence, *after* the sentence-ending full stop, even if you are referring to something earlier in the sentence. Avoid consecutive footnotes; instead, place all information in one footnote if possible.
4. *Correctly indicate titles.* The titles of books and journals should italicised; the title of articles should be in inverted quotes.
5. *Indicate quotes with either quotation marks or by using a block quote.* Extra flourishes, such as italicising, are unnecessary. And never place a block quote within quotation marks.
6. *Learn the difference between a hyphen (-), en-dash (–), and em-dash (—).* Use an en-dash like 'to' in ranges of dates or numbers (e.g. 87–142) and to express certain relationships between words: for example, an 'on–off switch' or 'Irish–American relations'. Either an en- or em-dash can be used to indicate a parenthetical phrase. If you use an en-dash, add a space either side – like so – but em-dashes are always unspaced—like so.
7. *Make ellipses with three full stops separated by spaces.* Like this . . . , with a space either side. You will most commonly use an ellipsis to indicate portions of text that you've omitted from quotes. Don't omit any sentence-ending full stops that precede an ellipsis (i.e. together they make four stops). For example:

   > [P]articular care needs to be exercised when eliding text to ensure that the sense of the original is not lost . . . A deletion must not result in a statement alien to the original material. . . . Accuracy of sense and emphasis must accompany accuracy of transcription. (*CMS*, 16th, 13.49)

8. *Use a single space after full-stops.* A double space, once common, is now rightly recognised as unnecessary.

REFERENCING

In your essays you should reference both quotes and claims or arguments that originate from one of the authors you've been reading. You should also have a bibliography of all the works you've referred to in the text.

You can use whatever bibliographical style you choose, so long as it's consistent. The following is an example of a typical author–year referencing style, starting with what the bibliography will look like:

1. This includes full stops, commas, colons, semi-colons, and quotations marks.

Book: Author (Year) *Title*, Place: Publisher.

> Fine, G. (1993) *On Ideas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
>
> Freeman, S. (ed.) (2003) *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Article: Author (Year) 'Title', *Journal*, Volume, pp. Pages.

> Irwin, T.H. (1977) 'Plato's Heracleiteanism', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 27, pp. 1–13.

Article in book: Author (Year) 'Article Title' in Editor(s) (ed(s).) *Book Title*, Place: Publisher.

> Scanlon, T.M. (2003) 'Rawls on Justification' in S. Freeman (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

In-text citation: (Author, Year, Page(s))

> It has been argued that the charge of conservatism laid against Rawls' idea of reflective equilibrium is unsound (Scanlon, 2003, pp. 150–151).
>
> Scanlon argues that the charge of conservatism laid against Rawls' reflective equilibrium is unsound (2003, pp. 150–151).

PLAGIARISM

Koç University does not tolerate plagiarism of any kind or degree, whether deliberate or accidental.

Definition

The presentation of someone else's work—such as their ideas or phrases—without acknowledgement, so that it is presented as your own work. It is entirely *your* responsibility to learn what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

Degree of plagiarism

No amount of plagiarism is acceptable: a single plagiarised line in an essay will result in failure, and could result in disciplinary procedures.

Quotation marks

Quotations need to be in quotation marks; otherwise, it is plagiarism, whether or not you cite the author. If you fail to know this after your first week of undergraduate, you are unfit for any role in academia.

Accidental vs. deliberate

Students accused of plagiarism invariably claim that it was accidental. This is irrelevant: the problem is the plagiarism itself, not the motivation behind it. The consequences of allegedly accidental plagiarism are no different from deliberate plagiarism. Frankly, if you are unable to avoid plagiarism even while sincerely trying, you should not be in a university, just as you should be allowed to drive if you accidentally run people over.

If you are worried that you might be plagiarising, you can ask me before you submit your work.

Paraphrasing

Read this section very very carefully.

Paraphrasing an author is repeating what they say, but in your own words. Some forms of paraphrasing are acceptable, others are not. One reason to paraphrase is simply to state the author's ideas in your essay, perhaps to support your argument: if you genuinely use your own words and reference the author, this is perfectly acceptable. But if you paraphrase because you are unable to describe what they say by yourself—since you do not trust your English, for example, or fully understand them—then you are probably plagiarising, *even if you cite the author.*

Never use paraphrasing as a *writing* tool. Directly using an author's words to construct your own sentences or paragraphs—looking back and forth at what they wrote as you write—will almost certainly result in plagiarism, even if you try to change the words. What should guide you when you are writing about an author's ideas is not the words they use, but your understanding of what they mean. As a rule of thumb, ask yourself 'could I have written what I wrote even if I had entirely forgotten the original author's original words?' If your answer is no, then you are probably plagiarising their writing, since a genuine understanding of their ideas will be independent of the words and phrases they use to express them.