

“Teaching Writing in Philosophy Courses”

Essay Assignment, Part One PHIL301

Over the course of the semester, you will construct an essay on the significance of Ancient Greek philosophy. The essay will be constructed in stages, which will culminate in a substantial essay due at the semester’s end.

The first major element of the essay will concern the Pre-Socratics. You will write a short essay indicating the significance of this philosophical period.

The second major element of the essay will concern the significance of Socrates and/or Plato. This essay will incorporate the first: you will revise the first essay so as to fit with materials of the second.

Thirdly, you will add a research element to your existing discussion. You will find a secondary source assisting your commentary on the significance of Ancient Greek philosophy and incorporate it into your essay.

Incorporation into the final draft of material from Aristotle will be encouraged but not mandatory.

Part One: Essay One

Note-Taking: Your first exercise is to demonstrate good note-taking practice. This will involve a succinct summary of a text along with a brief evaluation of it.

Concept Explication: Your second exercise is to state and explain a key concept by reference to one or more of our authors. This will be a formal writing assignment, to be incorporated into the draft of Essay One.

Full Draft of Essay One: The thesis of this essay will be a statement of the significance of Pre-Socratic philosophy. Your task will be to communicate to the reader a clear sense of why we consider this period of philosophy important.

More specific details of the assignments will be announced in due course.

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Concept Explication Exercise
PHIL301

The second element in construction of your first essay is concept explication. In this exercise, you will state and explain one of our central concepts. Here are some of the central concepts that we have encountered thus far:

anthropomorphism	cosmos
supernaturalism	<i>logos</i>
naturalism	<i>arche</i>
rationalism	<i>phusis</i>
chaos	

In undertaking this exercise, you should consider the overall topic for the first essay, the significance of the Pre-Socratic era of philosophy. Your task in the essay will be to relate to the reader some measure of the meaning or importance of this philosophical movement. So, in choosing a concept to explicate in the present exercise, think about how you might go about doing that. Likely, you will need to employ more than one of the above concepts, in order to present an effective account. But you can get started, here, by focusing on one of the above.

So, your task is to state and explain one of the above concepts, by reference to the materials of the course encountered thus far (i.e., up through Zeno), with an eye to indicating the significance of the Pre-Socratic philosophers. In executing this task, please keep in mind the following:

- Stating and explaining the concept involves both defining it in general terms and applying it to some specific instance (or instances).
- You must connect the concept explicitly to the thought of one (or more) of our philosophers (or Hesiod). Ideally, you should connect both the general account and specifics to your author/s. In any case, say how the thought of the author/s exemplifies (or not) the concept in question.
- You must also indicate why the concept is important or significant. It helps, in doing so, to be direct: go ahead and say, “The concept of ____ is significant because...” You may have to think about what to say here: why *are* these writers important? What is the importance of the concept you are discussing?
- It might be wise to treat the above three sub-tasks independently – i.e., in separate paragraphs.

Officia:

- Please type and double-space your exercise.
- You have a maximum limit of 300 words. (The full essay will be around 1000 words.) Include a word-count in your header.
- Due Thursday, September 18, in class.

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Illustration

Don't do this:

Arche means “principle”. For example, Thales said that the *arche* of reality is water.

Do this:

An *arche* is what we might call a principle. Principles, for us, are highly general concepts by reference to which we explain the fundamental nature of some class of phenomena. Thus, for instance, one might wonder what is the *arche* by which a boomerang operates – what is that principle defining its motions when thrown? Moreover, an *arche* is for the Pre-Socratics a kind of *logos* (word or concept), meaning that humans are capable of *understanding* or *intellectually grasping* an *arche*. If a boomerang has a logical *arche*, then it is possible for humans to understand how it operates. In addition, *arche* are for the Pre-Socratics typically also *phusoi*, meaning that they identify the essence of natural-world objects. This would imply that the motion of the boomerang somehow derived from some natural substance or force in nature – e.g., perhaps that of wood.

An example of Pre-Socratic use of *arche* is Thales' concept of water, “out of which all existing things are composed and out of which they originally come into being and that into which they finally perish.” (11A2, p. 9) That is, Thales believed that there is a single principle defining the nature and behavior of the whole natural world. In its unelaborated form, we experience water as a clear liquid. Evidently, however, its permutations account for earth, wood, salt, lightning – all natural phenomena.

The significance of Pre-Socratic use of *arche* lies in the naturalism and rationalism implied by that use. Where *archia* are *phusoi* and also *logoi*, a world defined by them is a self-contained natural order capable of human understanding. This is important to the development of the western intellectual tradition because it makes feasible the enterprise of science. Only if we believe in naturalistic, logical *archia* does it make sense to pursue human knowledge of the workings of our world.

300 words (excluding reference)