

First Paper: Thales, Heraclitus, Parmenides, the Atomists, Plato, Boethius, Aquinas, Pico

Due as an email attachment (.doc) by 4PM on Friday, March 5th

Write a paper of about **five pages (~1500 words)** using one of the following prompts. Be sure to cite passages from the text(s) to support your position, and to present a unified and coherent argument that shows your own philosophical thinking, and does not merely summarize the readings or our class discussion. You may use any style sheet you like (Chicago, MLA, etc.) but use it consistently. Plato texts should be cited by Stephanus numbers (e.g. “*Meno*, 97b), and Presocratic texts by fragment number and page (e.g. Parmenides, #3, p. 96). Page number citations are sufficient for all other texts. I am happy to look at drafts of thesis statements, outlines, etc., or to discuss paper ideas with you during office hours or via email, but *I will not respond to such requests initiated less than 24 hours before the paper is due.*

Prompts:

A) How does Plato’s theory of recollection work with his conception of (true) knowledge? Is the theory of recollection really necessary for this conception? Why or why not? If it is necessary, explain why you think the theory of recollection is needed to make his theory of knowledge work. If it isn’t, explain how his conception of knowledge could be seen to work *without* the theory of recollection. Cite passages to support your position and your reading.

B) Pick one major concept related to self, world, or knowledge discussed in the Presocratic fragments we read (from Thales, Heraclitus, Parmenides, or the Atomists). Briefly explain this concept, citing the text to support your reading, and then show how that concept has reappeared in one of the subsequent authors we’ve read (Plato, Boethius, Aquinas, or Pico). Is the concept functioning in the same way for the later philosopher, or do you think its role has changed? Use the text(s) to support your claim.

C) Compare the accounts of free will and determinism in any two philosophers we’ve read so far. How are their accounts similar, and how are they different? Which view are you more inclined to accept -or do you reject both views? Be sure to illustrate a good understanding of the texts you choose, and to argue for your own position.

D) Many of the thinkers we have read so far have posited the existence of some “transcendent” category or entity: the Good, The Forms, the One, Unity, God, etc. Give a *philosophical* (as opposed to historical, socio-political, cultural, or religious) explanation for why they might have made such claims. Do you find these reasons convincing? Why or why not? Discuss this question using one or more of the philosophers we have studied thus far. Be sure to explain your position, and to give reasons for your agreement or disagreement.

E) Choose a verse passage from Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy* that addresses a philosophical theme, concept, or issue important to the ideas presented in the book. Explicate the poem, explaining what you interpret it to mean (and why) and show how it relates to one or more key philosophical themes in the text.