

Everett Fulmer  
Loyola University New Orleans  
PHIL-R122 Philosophy of the Human Person

## Plato Paper

*Overview:* This is prompt for a paper about Book VIII of Plato's *Republic*. The paper is optional. It provides an opportunity to improve your grade, for both students who select the Pass/Fail or the A-F grade option. If you do not do the paper, your course grade will be calculated as if this assignment does not exist. As this paper is optional, do not turn in crap quality paper. You know what half-hearted, rushing-the-night-before papers look like. Do not give me one.

On the other hand, since the paper is optional, I will include the following additional extra-credit potential. Turning in a solid A paper, with a well-planned structure, beautiful English, and a thorough engagement with the material, will bump your final course grade an *additional half letter* beyond the standard bump you receive from earning an A.

The paper is due Sunday May 3<sup>rd</sup> by 11:59pm CST.

*General Rules:* The **maximum** length is 2,000 words. You can easily write an A paper in less space. Aim for between 1,000-1,500 words. You must do a lot in the short space to which I am limiting you. That is to say, the short length of the paper is part of the challenge. And this is for your benefit: writing concisely is a skill that you ought to cultivate. You must turn in the paper digitally via Blackboard. All papers will be checked for plagiarism by digital plagiarism checking tools. NB, the default consequence for any plagiarism is **failure of the course**.

*Advice:* First, writing philosophy is writing an argument. You are to attempt to state in the most convincing manner you can, the reasons why you think something is true. Second, philosophical writing should be concise, rigorous, and clear. *Only* include sentences that are required to get the reader from your introduction to your conclusion. No Fluff! Third, philosophical writing should be a back and forth process between writing the actual essay and formulating/revising an outline. You need a clear and concise roadmap to be able to write in a clear and concise manner. Finally, for further guidance, carefully read and follow the advice found here:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

*Specific Instructions.* Your paper will have three main components. But of course, you will likely have more than three paragraphs, since good writing requires that each paragraph expresses a single unified idea. I give below instructions for each part of the paper.

*Part 1: The Introduction.* Briefly state the topic of the paper. Describe what you will do in the paper. And be sure to clearly state what you will argue (see part 3). Please, do not include any fluff in the introduction like "Plato was one of the greatest philosophers ever...*blah blah barf*."

*Part 2: Explain.* Your second task is to clearly explain why Plato thinks that democracy can easily slide into Tyranny. A good explanation of Plato's views here must include, of course, explaining

exactly what Plato means by “democracy” and “tyranny.” And then also explain his argument—in step by step detail—for why the former is claimed to slide into the latter.

*Part 3: Evaluate.* Your third and final task is to evaluate Plato’s claim that democracy easily slides into tyranny. This is where you develop an argument of your own. In short, your task is to argue whether history and current events either confirm or disconfirm Plato’s view. I ask that you limit your consideration of history and current events to a single nation. Most of you ought to write about the United States. You may only write about another nation if you have lived most of your life in another nation and are more familiar with it than the U.S.

Your evaluation will include two main steps:

- A. Generate a list of data: find a list of historical and current events in your nation.
- B. Demonstrate how the majority of those data points either confirm or disconfirm Plato’s view.

NB, step (A) is where you will be tempted to be biased and cherry pick events that pre-judge your conclusion. You must fight that tendency! Do all you can to look for data points contrary to your gut reaction about what you think is true. **Actively looking for contrary data points is the only way to be rational.** Any idea, no matter how false, can be confirmed if you are only looking for evidence in its favor.

The data points you choose **must** be reported by at least three different news outlets. Current event stories that only appear in a single news source are less likely to be true.

The conclusion of your argument in Part 3, and thereby the conclusion of your paper, will be one of the following (of course, you need not write either of these sentences verbatim in your paper, but your paper must include a final conclusion that is equivalent to one of these):

1. Plato’s reasons for thinking that democracy easily slides into tyranny successfully predict (either historical or) current events in the United States. Thus, there is reason to think that American democracy is sliding into tyranny.
2. Plato’s reasons for thinking that democracy easily slides into tyranny predict historical and current events that are **not (or are rarely)** occurring in the United States. Thus, there is **little** reason to think that American democracy is sliding into tyranny.

If you meet the criteria above for writing about another nation, then, of course, your conclusion will have the names “United States” and “American” substituted for your nation’s appropriate terms.

At the end of your paper, affix a bibliography with all the sources you used to gather your data points. You may use any official style of bibliography and citations that you like (e.g., Chicago, MLA, APA, etc.).

Any questions? Call or email me! I’m always here to help.