Third Paper:

21L001: FOUNDATIONS I PROFESSOR KIBEL
FINAL PAPER ASSIGNMENT

The same rules apply as before. Papers will be due on May 3rd at the outset of class. In cases where extensions have been granted, you are advised that the requirements of filing grades makes it impossible that I receive any paper later than Monday, December 19th, at 9 A.M.

Papers should be at least eight pages in length, double-spaced, or the equivalent. (Figure 350 words/page.) You may write on any topic centrally concerned with Plato's *Republic*, Aristotle's *Ethics*, *Genesis*, *St. Matthew*, Augustine's *Confessions*, or Dante's *Inferno*. If you wish to include reference or analysis to other texts read this term, that is all to the good, but the primary focus must be on one of these just listed.

Once again, the following topics are meant to be suggestive; for this reason, sometimes a topic will list a number of questions. You are not expected to answer all of them. Eight pages is barely enough to scratch the surface of any one.

SUGGESTED TOPICS

Discuss the theory of Thrasymachus about justice at the outset of the *Republic*. How does it differ and how does it resemble the theory of Glaucon (who is only reporting on "what people say")? How good is Thrasymachus's case? How well does Socrates refute it? At the end of this part of the dialogue, Socrates says that he has got the better of Thrasymachus's arguments but still doesn't know what justice is. Is he right? How well or badly is the rest of the argument of *The Republic* forshadowed in this part of the book?

Give a careful account of the dialogue between Socrates and Polemarchus and/or Thrasymachus at the outset of the *Republic*, highlighting the ways in which the course of the argument lays the groundwork for the conclusions that Socrates will ultimately defend and remark in any fashion that you see fit on the adequacy of the argument.

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Elucidate any major element of the ensuing text (e.g., Glaucon's myth of Gyges, the validity of the analogy between the individual and the *polis* (that is, the state, as our translation puts it), the divided line and its connection to the parable of the Cave, the ultimate definitions of the four cardinal virtues [laid out at 433c-d], the issues surrounding the notion that we must have composite selves if the notion "master of oneself" is to have meaning, and so forth), giving a careful account of its presentation in the book and connecting it to what you think is the overall point of view that Plato is pushing.

How do you square the fact that there are two orders of society (Guardians and People), three faculties in the mind, and four virtues? What does this match-up imply, in your way of thinking about any of the following: the book's conception of virtue? the analogy between the state and the individual? the relation between "justice" and "temperance" or "self-control", both of which seem to apply to the state as a whole, rather than belonging to a particular group within it?

Is Socrates right in his judgment upon the Sophists (493b-d)? Does this judgement rightly apply to politicians today or to those who teach the "arts of success" in any competitive or adversarial branch of human endeavor, such as business or law?

Elucidate the Parable of the Cave in Plato's *Republic*. How apt are the various details to the argument of the book as a whole? Are the three parts of the soul represented in the story? Why would those in the cave wish to kill anyone who's been out looking at the sun? After all, his/her eyes aren't used to darkness, and so he/she must seem a bumbling, ineffectual sort of person. What is the point in the parable of being able to look at the sun? Can we ever "gaze upon" the sun?"

Of course, none of us would want to live in Plato's *Republic*. Plato would have Socrates say that this is a good test of whether we are right-minded or one of the corrupt types described at the end of the book. How wrong is he?

Explain how well Aristotle's view that "you never deliberate about ends" (insisted on at various points, particularly in (III, 3) suits his view that "practical wisdom [*phronēsis*] deliberates well about what sorts of thing conduce to the good life generally, not just particular things" (i.e., the account of practical wisdom in Bk VI).

If practical wisdom isn't an art, it isn't of any use in making us good; if it is, we needn't know it but can hire a trainer. How does Aristotle's answer to this paradox (raised at the end of Bk VI) jibe with his general position about virtue?

Explain the analogy that Aristotle draws between the way in which cleverness or "smarts" relates to practical wisdom and the way in which natural virtue relates to virtue or excellence in the true sense. (VI, 13.) How is this illustrative of Aristotle's whole conception of the place of virtue or excellence in human life?

The aim of life is happiness, says Aristotle. There are many who would regard this as untrue, others as perhaps true but something to be regretted, for this aim is incompatible with true morality, still others who regard this as a diminution of the seriousness of life. (Certain philosophers have condemned Jefferson's "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as a trivialization of the aims of political union.) Comment.

Being virtuous (excellent) or acting virtuously (or excellently or nobly–it all depends on the translation) must give oneself pleasure–be good for oneself in the sense that it affords pleasure. Someone who acts virtuously but doesn't take pleasure in the activity is not a fully realized human being. Elucidate as simply as possible some of the grounds for this view of Aristotle's.

Some think that the purpose of ethical inquiry and argument is to persuade those who aren't ethical to start becoming ethical. Aristotle says that ethical inquiry is extremely important (throughout Book I) and that it's about how to become good (Bk II, ch 2). At the same time, he doesn't think that people who aren't already good (like young men, who don't know enough about life) can understand what he has to say or profit from it. And he says the same of those whose character has been already be formed by experience and don't have the right views of life. The paradox involved here occurs in one version in III, 6, where Aristotle examines the view that either people see the good properly because they've been lucky enough to get the right ideas into their heads or they don't, because they haven't been that lucky, and so you can't praise one and blame the other, since both are doing what they think is good, as they see it. How would Aristotle deal with any aspect of this?

Explain what Aristotle might mean by saying that "man has a function", even as a carpenter and a tanner has.

Both Aristotle and Plato make reference to the existence of something called "*technē*",which is variously translated as "art" or "craft" (as in the phrase "arts and crafts"--boat-building, woodworking, and such like). Discuss briefly the place of this term in the argument of either or compare the use in both. Or: Aristotle at one point (I, 7) argues that if musicians or shoemakers have an "*ergon*" (a direction of their activity towards an end that defines the activity as that of a musician or a shoemaker), so human beings must have an "*ergon*" as well, a direction of their activity that defines it as human activity. How good is this analogy?

Try to explain the difference between the views of Aristotle and Plato upon any really important point in their conception of the ethical life and how it relates to their overall conceptions. For example: Aristotle has a notion of the value of learning about ethics that is very different from Plato's.

In the *Odyssey* as well as in *The Gospel acording to St Matthew* a chief lord moves about among his subjects in the guise of the lowest of the low, testing the faith (or faithfulness) of his subjects. Take any passage (say, the warning given to Amphinomous by Odysseus) and compare it with one in the Gospel (say, the rich man who was advised to give all to the poor), and compare the two for similarities. What difference does the context of each story make to its meaning?

More generally: Compare the "testings", "vexings", or "taking the measure of" characters in the *Odyssey* with the testings in *Genesis*: Adam, Abraham, Joseph's brothers by Joseph.

Discuss the implications of the story of the Garden of Eden in *Genesis* in any way that seems relevant to ethical issues.

In a passage in St Matthew, Jesus says to a young man who is wealthy: "It is harder for a rich man to enter heaven than for a camel to pass through they eye of a needle. After hearing Jesus say this, the disciplines ask, "Who then can be saved (if not the rich)?" What is the point of this response?

Compare the character of prophecy in *St. Matthew* with the character of prophecy in any other text or texts read this term.

"Gospel" means good news. What is the good news? For whom is it good? In line with these questions, St. Matthew is full of "fulfillments". These have been described as "bringing to completion by something which both duplicates and *exceeds* its model." In what sense is the gospel in excess of what it fulfills?

What are parables? Are the parables properly interpreted by Jesus in the way in which St. Matthew has Jesus interpret them? Can other texts read this term (apart from Plato's "Parable of the Cave") be interpreted as parables?

Fidel Castro, while visiting the USA a few years ago (he was admitted in order to give an address at the United Nations) referred to Jesus as a "revolutionary". How revolutionary are the teachings of Jesus in St. Matthew? Compare the view of mankind implied by the Sermon on the Mount and what is demanded of it ("Be ye perfect . . . ") with the view of Plato or of Aristotle.

Aristotle's *Ethics* and the two Biblical texts are, in a sense, compilations and contain what seem to be serious contradictions. Select any text and write about three instances of contradiction in some fashion that illuminates the argument or thematic intention of the text in question.

Augustine claims (in Book 8, ch. 5 of the *Confessions*) that he had learned the truth from the Platonists and yet still resisted turning to God. There is thus a distinction between what Plato thinks that knowledge and understanding can provide and what Augustine thinks is needed for salvation by a creature in a fallen state with a divided will. Comment.

Discuss the notions that Augustine has of speech (he was a teacher of rhetoric until his conversion) and the role that these notions play in his account of his life as exemplary of the human condition.

Augustine's *Confessions* had for its model certain accounts of the conversions of various exemplary figures in the early history of Christianity. As an autobiography, even a spiritual autobiography, it puts in much that most accounts of an author's life would leave out and leaves out much that is put in. (E.g., we first learn that Augustine had siblings in Book nine, when Monica is dying.) Elucidate.

Compare the character of prophecy in *St. Matthew* with the character of prophecy in any other text or texts read this term.

Augustine says that "evil is nothing but the removal of good until finally no good remains." He also says that God's punishments are for sins that we commit against ourselves, doing wrong to our souls, and that every soul that sins brings its own punishment upon itself. How does Augustine's idea of evil compare with Plato's? Plato's Parable of the Cave is one of the first expressions of the idea of "conversion"--you turn and see the light. How does the notion of conversion figure in *The Republic* and the *Confessions*?

Dante's afterlife is peopled with three sorts: those of antiquity, in respect of which Dante does not properly distinguish between historical figures and those of imaginative literature, those (very few indeed) from biblical literature, and those from fairly recent history--say, the last 80 or so years, some of whom he knew and almost all from Italy. Comment.

Dante's poem has epic beginnings--a man who can't get where he wants to go, a heavenly assembly with feminine intercession on his behalf, a message-bearer to send him on his way. Is the parallel with the *Odyssey* illuminating or not?

Dante places virtuous pagans in Hell. He places the prodigal higher than the spendthrift, murderers higher than the noble Ulysses, and counterfeiters right next to the bottom, wherein are placed the worst of the lot. Clearly a schematic arrangement, but one puzzling from our modern point of view. Comment.

The gate over hell says (among other things) that it was made by divine power (or authority), highest wisdom, and primal (or first) love, that justice moved its creator, and that those who enter must abandon every hope. Comment on what Dante finds in Hell in the light of this inscription. Alternatively: Virgil says that those in Hell have "lost the good of the intellect". What does the phrase mean in the light of the poem?

The notion that the punishment fits the crime is supposed to be omnipresent in Dante. Indeed, it has been said that in Hell, the punishment *is* the crime--that the characters are condemned to be eternally what they were (or had become) in life as that "what they were" is understood in the light of (1.) their desires or loves and (2.) their deeds, which enacted those desires. Comment and discuss with reference to several examples in the poem.

If, as we just said, the characters are condemned to be eternally what they were or had become in life as that "what they were" is understood in the light of their desires or loves and their deeds, which enacted those desires, then

(a) the characters in Hell may be understood as an instance of Aristotle's maxim that character is defined and determined by action quite as much as the reverse, and that after a time, it is too late to change--one has become what one is for good. (Cf Nic. Ethics, Bk III, ch. v.) Perhaps in Dante's view Aristotle, who lived before the redemptive acts of Jesus, gave an account of the representation of what things are like when the possibility of radical change and salvation was not understood or did not yet exist.

(b) perhaps Dante, passing among the damned, sometimes responds to them in ways that shows the possibility that he might share their fate. Dante's interaction with the dead is most evident in Cantos V, X, XIII, XV, XVI, XXXII, and XXXIII.

Comment on either (a) or (b)

One might say that the *Inferno* suffers from an excess of beginnings. There is the prologue, there is the Ante-Inferno, there is Limbo, there is Dante's encounter with Francesca (who most clearly represents *amore* or love gone astray), there is the drama of the entry into the city of Dis, or Hell proper, when the journey moves from sins of incontinence to those of violence and fraud. Comment.

We have noted that the three main divisions in Hell—the incontinent, the violent, the fraudulent follows Aristotle's division (to some extent at least) between incontinence, viciousness, and bestiality, as outlined in the *Ethics*, VII, i. How do the punishments differ in these sections? What is the significance of the Wall of Dis, which divides Hell proper from the realm of the incontinent and the suburbs of Those who Stood for Nothing and the virtuous pagans?

Take any three passages and discuss the nature of the eternal condition or punishment of those there, commenting on the presentation in any way appropriate. Choices to consider: the virtuous pagans, Francesca and Paolo (the adulterers), Farrinate and Cavalcante (the heretics), Ser Brunetto Latini (Dante's old teacher), Ulysses and Diomedes (the false counselors), Ugolino (who was walled up with his sons and starved to death).

As the protagonist of a *comedy*, which always grants special dispensation from harm and evil, Dante cannot be hurt by what he sees. Or can he? Anyway, he has Virgil to protect him. Or does he actually have to protect himself? And he is changed by what he sees--at the end of the poem, he participates fully in the judgement of the wicked (Ugolino), even though the tale told by the sinner is worthy of more pity than any other we have heard (and we hear nothing else about this sinner except his terrible suffering at the end of his life). Comment.