

PHIL 457/557: Plato's Concept of Truth

We all know many truths—for example, that Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president of the United States, that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius, and that $2 + 1 = 3$. We also know that there are genuine dollar bills and counterfeit ones. Here, we have two senses of truth: authenticity and facticity, both of which we readily understand. But what is the essence of each, and how are they related?

Furthermore, how does truth as facticity, on the one hand, and authenticity, on the other, relate to true thought? Is true thought a third kind of truth, distinct from the previous two, or is it somehow identical with one or both? Finally, what role does truth play in human life, and in the good life in particular? Does truth set us free, as the saying goes, or is it unbearable to behold?

These and related questions will guide our investigation of truth (*aletheia*) in Plato. The main text for this course is *Republic*, supplemented by readings from *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Cratylus*. Through engagement with these challenging texts, we will deepen our understanding of some of Plato's best-known ideas, including the theory of Forms, the distinction between knowledge and true opinion, and the philosopher's right to govern—despite their desire to devote themselves to the study of truth. We will also pay close attention to lesser-known ideas, such as the intriguing notion of "true falsehood" in the *Republic* and *Theaetetus*, as well as questions about the correctness of names (in the *Cratylus*) and of artistic patterns (*Republic* 2–3, 10).

Alongside these texts, we will read essays by Iris Murdoch, Myles Burnyeat, Lesley Brown, Catherine Rowett, Jacob Klein, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Marcel Detienne, among others.

Students are required to attend regularly, engage closely with the texts, and submit written comments each week. The final grade is based on class participation and weekly responses (20%) and a final paper (80%, 13–15 pages).