

PIU44011 – Ancient Philosophy: Plato on Human Evil

Module Information	
Module Code	PIU44011
Module Title	Ancient Philosophy: Plato on Human Evil
Department	Philosophy
Year Group	Senior Sophister
Module Personnel	Professor Vasilis Politis
Academic Year	2026-27
Credit Weighting	10 ECTS
Semester	1
Contact Hours	22

Module Content	
Module Description	I am currently writing a book on Plato on Human Evil. It is at quite an advanced stage. I would like to share my thoughts in it with you and see what you think. I think the topic is of great interest. <i>The negative part of the book</i> The received view for the past many decades is that Plato thinks that (VIEW 1) an evil person is a person who is ignorant of the good; and (VIEW 2) an evil person is a person whose soul is disorderly because it is not ruled by reason. I argue that Plato does not hold either of these views. These views account correctly for how Plato thinks of a person who is not good; but they do not account for how he thinks of a person who is evil, as opposed to simply not good. There are (at least) four passages in Plato in which he argues that (DIST) there is a substantial distinction between a person who is not good (= is bad) and a person who is opposite of good (= is evil). None of the numerous critics who espouse VIEWS 1 and 2 consider these passages, or DIST, in their defense of these views; and this shows that their defense is inadequate.

Module Content

	<i>The positive part of the book</i> I put forward and defend, two major theses about Plato's view of an evil person. These theses are practically absent from the modern literature on Plato's view of an evil person. The only exception I know of is a paper in <i>Philosophical Review</i> from 1937, in which Raphael Demos (a then Harvard professor, originally Greek and from Smyrna, now Izmir, which is where my grandfather was from) states precisely these two theses; but he simply states them, without elaborating or defending them. The two theses are, however, present in the ancient literature on Plato's view of an evil person. THESIS 2 is put forward, elaborated and defended by Proclus, who sees himself as interpreting Plato, in his <i>De malorum subsistentia</i> (<i>On the existence of evils</i>). The two theses are as follows: (THESIS 1) Plato thinks that an evil person does not desire the good. (THESIS 2) Plato thinks that an evil person is actively opposed to the good. THESIS 1 contradicts all modern critics, except Demos, for they think that Plato thinks that everyone desires the good. THESIS 2 is not recognized by any modern critic, except Demos.
Module Learning Aims	See above
Learning Outcomes	See above
Indicative Reading / Resources	TBA

Assessment

Assessment Components	Two essays and an online exam.
Assessment Details	Two essays worth 25% each and an online exam worth 50%.

Additional Information

Prerequisites	None.
Co-requisites	None.