General Guidance on Reading Questions

Careful reading requires active reflection and response. Real learning does not happen passively. It has been shown convincingly that when you explain something and put it in writing, you gain understanding far more efficiently than when you simply try to absorb information. (This is a principle that can be applied beneficially to all aspects of your studies!) Of course, reading will very often be the necessary first step before you can engage your critical faculties in this way. The main purpose of the reading questions is to make sure that you are not spending a lot of time reading, only to forget it quickly and lose much of the lasting value of reading, by requiring you to make the (relatively) small investment in writing down your own thoughts.

These questions are written assignments. You will be expected to share your work in class and to make it available for me to collect and evaluate.

Your basic goal, with each question, is to write a short paragraph (at least a few sentences) in which you state as clearly and convincingly as you can

- some promising arguments or claims that could be pursued in order to develop a longer answer to the question (for example, a paper)
- the specific texts (cited by page number, fragment number, line number, etc.) that you believe would serve as the strongest and richest basis on which to pursue those answers – including why you believe this or how they could be analyzed to shed light

Since the goal is always to make yourself state the best possible reflections upon the readings, it is always all right to modify and redirect the question, challenge its premises, etc., if that will lead you to a more compelling answer and basis for future thinking!

Reading Questions

1. Pages 11-15 of Osborne present an example of trying to unpack the meaning of a fragment (page 12, Box 1). The same fragment was also handed out for discussion in class. What are some philosophical questions raised in this text, beyond the issues addressed by Osborne?

2. Parmenides’ strict monism puts him at odds with virtually any modern perspective on the universe. We are being very un-Parmenidean when we acknowledge the existence of many fully real things. Still, out of these many things (which run the gamut from objects to abstractions), is there any thing (either in your view or in other modern people’s conceptions) that has important points of resemblance to Parmenides’ unchanging whole being? Address what is most strikingly like Parmenides’ idea and also what is most crucially unlike it.

3. In your experience of literature or argumentation, what is the most interesting parallel for Parmenides’ use of a teaching goddess speaking to an addressee in the second person? Does this do anything to illuminate Parmenides’ idea of how his poem ought to be consequential?