

Name:

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## Foundations Fall 2014: Final Exam Essays

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**Directions:** Choose ONE question from each section below, and answer it in the form of an essay. You may answer your questions in any order, but be sure to write the number of the question you are answering by your answer.

### Section I: Plato

1. There is much debate surrounding the question of whether or not Plato thought the Just City was materially realizable. Explain why there is a debate, what the two main opinions are, and why it matters for subsequent interpretation of Plato.
2. How does Socrates respond to Adeimantus' claim in Book VI that philosophers in realistic cities are generally perceived as either corrupt or useless? Explain the Allegory of the Ship in your response.
3. Explain Plato's Doctrine of the Forms. Compare/contrast it with the metaphysical or cosmological perspective typical of modernity (i.e. the relationship between being, becoming, knowledge, and opinion). Include in your answer a discussion of the Form of the Good (and why Plato allegorizes it as being like the sun), and an explanation for why the doctrine holds such appeal for Christian theology.
4. Explain the Divided Line. What does the Line analogy reveal about Plato's epistemology that is fundamentally different from that of most moderns? (How does Richard Dawkins' critique of Anselm's Ontological Argument in *The God Delusion* represent a failure to recognize this fundamental difference?)
5. Explain the Regime Taxonomy found in the closing books of the Republic. Describe each regime giving past or present examples of each, and discuss how Plato uses the parallel examples of family structures to explain why each regime ultimately degrades.

### (& Aristotle)

6. Explain how the difference between Aristotle's philosophy and Plato's can to some extent be traced back to the models of knowing upon which their philosophies were based. How does this difference lead to the classification of Plato as an Idealist and Aristotle as an Empiricist? Relate this to each philosopher's doctrine of Universals or Forms.
7. Discuss Aristotle's distinction between Matter and Form. Which is more 'real' in his view, and why? Why would Aristotle see strict Materialism and/or Idealism as an inadequate explanation(s) for reality? Explain the relationship of Aristotle's concept of the soul to matter and form, and how this concept enables us to place confidence in our senses as a means for knowing of experiences and knowing reality-in-itself.
8. Explain Aristotle's Four Causes. Why is the concept of Final Cause so controversial to modern (scientific) philosophers? Can science be meaningfully conducted without teleology? What challenges have been posed to it, and how might Aristotle be able to use the theories/conclusions of science itself respond to them?
9. Aristotle is known as the 'Father of Logic.' What was/is its purpose or value? Did Aristotle invent it, or discover it? Explain your answer, and explain the importance of the distinction to the significance of logic in contemporary (Postmodern) philosophy.
10. Aristotle claimed that the appropriate starting point of philosophy was to 'do justice to appearance,' thus he is often called the 'philosopher of common sense.' Explain what he meant by this, and how it led him to different philosophical conclusions than his predecessors and successors. Relate this claim to the efforts of philosophers (both before and after Aristotle) to 'get behind' appearances. How does the belief that philosophy is ultimately about knowing how to live shape Aristotle's thought and direct his criticism of his opponents (both ancient and modern)?
11. Explain Aristotle's concept of Act and Potency. How does this concept address the PreSocratic problem of Permanence and Change? What is its relevance to Catholic morality, particularly with respect to life issues such as abortion or euthanasia?

### Section II: Where do you stand?

12. Read the article entitled "Man Against Darkness," written by Walter Stace in 1948 for the *Atlantic Monthly*, and respond in two ways: First, tell me how Classical Realists such as Plato or Aristotle might respond to Stace. Second, tell me your own thoughts. Which view better accounts for reality, Classical Realism or Scientific Materialism (...or another possibility?) I do not need a point-by-point rebuttal to Stace in either case, but you should be able to grasp the essence of his position and respond to it, both from a realist perspective and from your own.
13. Read the article entitled "Sorry, But Your Soul Just Died," written by Tom Wolfe in 1996, and briefly explain why Wolfe thought Neuroscience was/is significant with respect to philosophy. Explain how the article might be seen as an example of the tension between the modern scientific worldview and Postmodernism. Finally, offer your thoughts on what the Classical Realist tradition might say in response to Wolfe.
14. Imagine the following scenario: You are married and in your 40s. You and your spouse have raised a daughter whom you have just helped move into her dorm room to begin her freshman year in college. She has always been a responsible person and academically gifted and disciplined, with a life of great potential ahead of her. One night, she goes out with a few of her new friends from college to a social event and although she behaves responsibly, she is unaware that the person who drove her there subsequently began drinking. When she gets in the car to go home, she does not know that the driver is impaired. At 2am you receive a phone call from a hospital telling you that your daughter has been in an accident and she is on life support. You are urged to get there as soon as possible, because her doctors doubt that she will survive the night. When you arrive, you are told that your daughter is in a coma, and if she does recover she will need extensive and prolonged reconstructive surgery. Then her doctor tells you the following:

"I know that you are currently filled with much fear and anguish, and that you probably feel like you're about to fall apart and you cannot function. Strange as it may sound, this is actually because you are experiencing a biochemical and neurological process to which we have given the label 'love,' that is probably just some sort of evolutionary survival mechanism that is really no longer

necessary. If you would like, I can prescribe a pill for you that will restore those processes to normal, and you will be able to function normally without all of the terrible feelings you are now experiencing. You will be indifferent to your daughter's condition, but your indifference won't bother you and the fact is there isn't anything you can do about her condition anyway. You might also be concerned that if your daughter awakens from her coma and you are not here she will miss your presence and this might in some way negatively impact her recovery, but we can administer the same drug to her as well, and she will feel fine. She will be just as indifferent to your absence as you are to her condition."

Would you take the drug? Why or why not? Before you answer (lest you think the answer a simple one), read the accompanying article entitled "Could We Reduce Love to a Pill," which might complicate things a bit... Whatever your answer, be sure to think it through philosophically.

15. Now suppose that your spouse was out of the country when the accident happened, and there was no way that s/he could get to the hospital in time to be by your daughter's side during her time of need... at least not by conventional means of travelling. But imagine that a new method of travelling by teleportation has been developed, by means of which your spouse could travel anywhere in the world almost instantly. This new technology is controversial and not widely available, but every time it has been used it has appeared to work flawlessly. The teleporter works by putting you to sleep, breaking down the atomic composition of your body, mapping it out completely, then reconstructing that structure precisely in another teleportation chamber. People who have used the teleporter emerge from it exactly the same as they were when they went it, but the controversy surrounding the technology has to do with various theories regarding what the machine actually does. Advocates claim that the machine causes no permanent harm to the traveler, as has been confirmed by numerous studies of health and memory conducted on people who have used the machine. But critics argue that the problem with the machine has to do with what happens when the traveler is deconstructed- they argue that at that point, the person is actually killed, and that the person who emerges from the machine, while identical in every materially measurable way, is simply not the same person. So, while the machine appears harmless, it is in fact deadly. In light of what is at stake, would you encourage your spouse to use the machine? Why or why not? Keep in mind that, to answer this question adequately, you must in some way explain what "you" are... and relate that explanation to the justification of your choice. (In other words, you must attempt to answer the Anthropological question)

### Section III: The Allegory of the Cave

16. Explain the purpose of the "Allegory of the Cave" in Plato's *Republic*, and explain how it was spiritualized by Early Christianity. What is it about the Allegory specifically and Platonic philosophy generally that the Early Church found to be so amenable to the Judeo-Christian concept of God? The Catholic and Orthodox traditions tend to see Plato as a sort of proto-Christian, the pagan equivalent to an Old Testament prophet whose philosophy was fulfilled by Christianity; on the other hand, some Protestant thinkers consider the Hellenization of the Early Church to be a corruption of Christian thought. With which perspective do you agree, and why?

### Section IV: The 'Big Questions': Scientific Naturalism vs. Metaphysical Realism

17. In light of what you've read in the Reynolds handout ("A Likely Story") and the McGrath handout ("Warfare"), is there a conflict between religion and science? If so, why? What is it about the nature of these two disciplines that puts them necessarily at odds with one another? If not, then why are they so commonly assumed to be at odds, and why is this common assumption a mistaken one?
18. Many philosophers have come to the conclusion that morality is a product of human evolution and not divine will or directive. Assuming this to be true, what are the consequences of this conclusion on human moral behavior? In other words, if morality is simply a mechanism for species survival, why be moral? If you still think we should be moral how should it be defined, and who should have the authority to do so?
19. The so-called 'New Atheists' like Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, et al. (Michael Shermer) see the existence of God as a scientifically testable hypothesis; they think it improvable and therefore irrational to believe. Implicit in this approach is the belief that science is the sole guarantor of truth claims ('Scientific Naturalism'). Agree or disagree, and explain your position.
20. Scientific Naturalists claim that immaterial concepts like 'thought,' or 'mind,' or 'love,' etc. either do not exist at all (therefore the words refer to nothing), are metaphors for essentially biological processes (the immateriality of their existence is an illusion), or they in some as-yet-unexplained way 'emerge' from biological processes (and so are dependent on them). Respond to these positions, and explain the consequences of your position on our ability to place confidence in any belief about any of these processes. Put another way: If your thought is a product of biological processes, then the thought 'all thought is the product of biological processes' is itself a product of those processes. How can you place any confidence in its correspondence to reality?

Now, those who have become members of this little group have tasted how sweet and blessed a possession philosophy is.

At the same time, they have also seen the insanity of the masses and realized that there is nothing healthy, so to speak, in public affairs, and that there is no ally with whose aid the champion of justice can survive; that instead he would perish before he could profit either his city or his friends, and be useless both to himself and to others- like a man who has fallen among wild animals and is neither willing to join them in doing injustice nor sufficiently strong to oppose the general savagery alone.

Taking all this into his calculations, he keeps quiet and does his own work, like someone who takes refuge under a little wall from a storm of dust or hail driven by the wind.

Seeing others filled with lawlessness, the philosopher is satisfied if he can somehow lead his present life pure of injustice and impious acts, and depart from it with good hope, blameless and content.

-Socrates to Adeimantus  
in Plato's *Republic*, Book 6