

# Foundations | Fall 2014 | First Essay Test: Pre-Modernism

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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. Answer any TWO questions today, and you will answer the other two tomorrow.

## Section I: Worldviews/Pre-Socratic Philosophers

1. Describe the three major worldview shifts in the history of Western thought. Explain what characterizes each shift with respect to the principal philosophical disciplines of metaphysics, epistemology, ontology, anthropology, and morality; discuss what brought about each shift, and what was gained and lost with each.
2. Explain the distinction between 'mythos' and 'logos' in the Pre-Modern worldview. How were both seen as means of arriving at and communicating Truth? What role does each play in Pre-Socratic philosophy and in the philosophy of Plato? How is the modern and postmodern understanding of myth different from the pre-modern, and what has caused these differences?
3. Parmenides and Heraclitus are thought to represent the opposite extremes in Pre-Socratic philosophy. Explain each philosopher's position, evaluating its weak and strong points. What ultimately makes both positions philosophically untenable? Explain why subsequent developments in Greek philosophy can be seen as attempts to respond to this dichotomy.
4. Explain the concepts of 'Being' and 'Becoming' in Pre-Socratic philosophy, and how they are related to the problems of 'the many and the One,' and Change and Permanence. Be sure to note the distinctions between different Pre-Socratics on these issues.
5. What is 'Sophistry'? Why was it so successful in ancient Athens? What was Socrates' problem with it? To what extent and in what ways might the contemporary West be seen as analogous to the end of the Athenian Golden Age and the rise of Athenian Sophistry?

## Section II: Plato's *Republic*

6. What are the three definitions for justice/morality proposed to Socrates in Book One of the *Republic*? How does he respond to each? Why does the first book end in *aporia*? What definition does Socrates ultimately propose for justice, and what does he mean by it?
7. What are Glaucon's three ways in which a thing can be good? What type of good does Glaucon think that justice is, and how does the legend of Gyges' ring make his point? What type of good does Socrates think that justice is, and why?
8. Plato thinks a person can be both too young to study philosophy and too old to turn to the study of philosophy, and he uses the character of Cephalus to make this point in the *Republic*. What are his reasons? Agree or disagree, and explain your position.
9. Why does Socrates think that the proliferation of doctors and lawyers indicates the degradation of a regime? Why will these two professions be far less prominent in the Kallipolis? What would Socrates think of the prominence of these professions in 21<sup>st</sup> century America? Do you agree or disagree with his likely assessment, and why?
10. Explain Plato's concept of the 'Tripartite Soul,' and how it relates to his claim that the city is the soul 'writ large.' If Plato is right, what can be said about the state of the 'soul' of the contemporary West?
11. At two points in the *Republic*, Plato suggests that it will be in the best interests of the city to lie to at least some of its citizens, or, perhaps, to tell them a 'myth.' Explain Plato's two 'lies' and why he considers them justifiable. Do you think such lies are ever justifiable (i.e. are there circumstances in which the state is justified in lying to its citizens? Why or why not?)

## Section III: Poets and Philosophers

12. What is 'music' in Pythagorean and Platonic thought? What is Plato's attitude towards music? Why are music and philosophy a threat to one another? What place is there for music in the Just city?
13. Bloom claims that 'students today know exactly why Plato takes music so seriously.' What does he mean by this, and why does he think Plato's perspective is particularly important today? Do you agree or disagree, and why? Bloom also argues that the point of rock music can be reduced to one thing –regardless of the lyrical content of a given song. What is this one thing, and why don't the lyrics matter?
14. Bloom states that 'Indignation is the soul's defense against the wound of doubt about its own; it reorders the cosmos to support the justice of its cause.' Explain this statement and its relevance to his discussion of music. How is this related to Plato's understanding of how music influences the soul?
15. Much of the *Republic* can be summarized in one key question: Who will rule the city, its poets or its philosophers? Explain why Plato thinks this question is so important and how he thinks it should be answered. Agree or disagree with Plato, and explain why.
16. Contemporary American culture understands the control of 'music' by government to be censorship and the restriction of freedom of expression. Explain why Plato thinks that this is an illusion. But then answer this: Specifically within the context of democracy (as opposed to the Kallipolis), would Plato still be opposed to 'artistic freedom'?

## Section IV: *Crimes and Misdemeanors*

17. Based on the film, how would Woody Allen answer the key question of the *Republic*, 'What is justice?' With which of the definitions offered in the dialogue would he be the most sympathetic, and why? Use examples from the film to make your case.
18. Cliff and Lester each hold different views about the purpose of their profession as filmmakers. Explain how their differing viewpoints offer insight into each man's character/soul, and how each might usefully illustrate Plato's concern about the role of music in a regime.
19. Throughout *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, Allen draws a contrast between life as it is depicted in film and the 'real world.' How is this ironic, in light of the fact that he is doing so in a film, and how does it illustrate a key point about 'music' that Plato makes in the *Republic*?
20. Consider the motif of sight/blindness that runs throughout the film. What point might Allen be trying to make with this motif, and how might it be related to the similar use of 'sight' as a metaphor for enlightenment in the *Republic*?
21. Using the character of Judah Rosenthal, explain why Socrates thinks a man whose soul is disordered (and therefore not harmonious) cannot really be happy, and how this relates to Socrates' claim that justice is the highest kind of good.