

Classical Political Thought

Essay I – Due Friday, October 19

In an 8-10+ page essay, with your name and title only at the top, double-spaced, with a title, written within normal margins in 12 point Times New Roman font, respond to one of the following prompts. Be sure to state your thesis in response to the prompt, and support it with at least four major points from the text, with quotes.

Option 1 – Were the Athenians Right to Execute Socrates?

For Socrates, the “citizen-philosopher” of Athens, nothing in life could be more important than the perfection of the individual soul. It was not his own soul that needed perfecting: his questions were aimed entirely at his fellow citizens. He compelled them to know themselves, to rise above the city’s conventional ways of understanding, and seek the purest truth, as it was known in itself. Better than Athenian justice was perfect Justice; better than beautiful things was *the* Beautiful itself; and better than the wisdom of man was the Wisdom of “the god.” But this proved to be a threat to Athens. Worse than treason or conspiracy against the city, Socrates’ philosophic questions were aimed directly at the laws and the gods, which were the moral foundations of citizens’ lives. They were weak foundations, of course, subject to every emotional whim of the multitude; but in practice, they were all the Athenians had – and they protected those values with the full force of democratic will. What was worse: Socrates appeared to admit the danger of his philosophizing, always unsure about the effect it might have on the souls of his young followers – and aware that his pursuit of truth might reveal that traditional laws and customs were all the Athenians really had. So what were the merits of the Athenian Assembly’s charge against Socrates in the *Apology*? Despite their flaws, did they have a point? Or was Socrates completely blameless, since all he ever wanted was the best thing for each individual, as he showed in the *Republic*? What would have to change for the philosopher and the city to get along: Socrates or Athens? In answering these questions, be sure to support the opposing sides.

Option 2 – Explaining Goodness to Tyranny

You’re befriended by the most successful tyrant-warlord-gangster-thug of all time. He has stamped out all enemies through a systematic plan of dominance; he owns the police and the justice system; he exerts perfect control over all national affairs; he maintains a constant feeling of crisis at the hands of foreign enemy states. Most importantly, though, he has won the absolute love of the people through luxury, flattery and social corruption – and a steady dose of fear, just in case. His rise to power was rapid and awe-inspiring, and it seems it will never end. Yet, for all his power, you find him to be surprisingly gentle-spirited in his old age, frequently retreating from the dirty work into a life of quiet leisure, piety toward the gods, and the study of old books saved from the bonfires – and he has read Plato’s *Republic*. Weighing the conversation between Socrates and Thrasymachus in his mind, he asks: “Isn’t Thrasymachus right? Why would a ‘good man’ ever enter politics? He belongs on his farm with his philosophy books, not in public life. And why would anyone in politics try to be good? If such a man was truly great, he wouldn’t worry about the laws and the traditions of the city and trying to bring virtue to the people – no, no. He would seek his own glory. Fake cities and ideas about virtue do not bring happiness. Only power does.” How would you explain Socrates’ view – that it is better to be good, especially as a leader – to a pure tyrant? How would you defend virtue and goodness? How would you defend justice when accident and force are what really rules the world?

Philosophy Essay Rubric

Content (60%). Engagement with the research.

_____ **Thesis (10%).** The general point of the essay is clearly stated.

_____ **Support (30%).** All claims are supported with quotes from the text.

_____ **Sources (20%).** There are adequate quotes from the primary sources.

Writing (30%). The essay is well-written according to the conventional rules of grammar, logic and presentation.

_____ **Grammar (15%).** Correct use of grammar, punctuation, and word-choice.

_____ **Argument (10%).** The thesis is supported by persuasive arguments based on sub-theses and quotes.

_____ **Style (5%).** The essay is written in a simple style that conveys the author's meaning.

Form (10%). The essay is organized, and follows the Turabian Manual of Style.

_____ **Structure (2.5%).** The essay is well-structured and orderly, using subtitles and sub-theses.

_____ **Citations (2.5%).** All sources are cited following the Turabian manual for citations.

_____ **Bibliography (2.5%).** All sources are listed in a bibliography.

_____ **Support (2.5%).** All claims are adequately supported with well-integrated quotes from the research.

TOTAL: _____

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Essay II Prompt

Due Friday, December 7

In an 8-10+ page essay, following all of the conventional rules of the Turabian Manual of Style, double-spaced, with a title, written within normal margins in 12 point Times New Roman font, respond to one of the following prompts. Report on what at least two modern (twentieth century) scholars have said about this topic in classical philosophy. Then state your thesis in response to the prompt, and support it with at least four major points from the text, with quotes, taken from different parts of the book.

- **Citizenship.** What makes a citizen? What sorts of things does the city assume about a citizen? What is the citizen's role in the city?
- **Corruption.** What is the reason for corruption of the city? What is the reason for corruption of the individual? How might the two relate?
- **Courage.** What is courage in the human soul? What are the main features of courage in practice? What does it do for the city?
- **Custom.** What is the purpose of custom, or tradition? What does it do for the laws? What does it do for individuals?
- **Family.** What is the nature of the family? What does it do for the citizen? How does it relate to the city?
- **Founding.** What is the meaning of the founding of a city? What kind of things should a city hope to have in its founding? What does the lawgiver-founder do for a city?
- **Friendship.** What is the nature of friendship? What do true friends do for each other? Why are they important for politics?
- **Gender.** What is femininity for human nature? What does it do for men? What do women do for the city?
- **Justice.** What is justice in the human soul? How does that relate to justice in the city? What can the force of custom do to ensure justice?
- **Leadership.** What are the qualities of a leader in a city? What do they do for their fellow citizens? What do they do for the laws and customs?
- **Moderation.** What does moderation mean for pleasure? What does moderation do for character? Why is it important for a life of virtue?
- **Pleasure.** What is the place of pleasure when it comes to virtue? What is its role in each of the virtues? What is its place in contemplation?
- **Power.** What is the problem of power in the human soul? How does power relate to justice? When can power and justice be in a good relationship?
- **Wisdom.** What are the different kinds of wisdom? What is the place of practical judgment in politics? What is the importance of theoretical wisdom?