

Midterm Essay Exam
 PHI 1000C
 SJU Spring 2018
 Professor Robert Grimwade

Answer ONE (1) of the following prompts in essay form. *Please answer every question that appears under the prompt you choose.* Your essay should be a **minimum of seven (7) full pages** (excluding bibliography page). You must use a standard font (e.g. *Helvetica Neue, Times New Roman, or Cambria*), 12 point, double-spaced (or single, if you prefer). You must support all of your claims with quotes, in-text citations, and/or philosophical argument in order to do well. In general, I tend to favor essays that extensively utilize the primary text (e.g. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*) rather than secondary sources (i.e. any other source). That said, secondary sources can be very helpful for understanding the material and, if you use them *effectively* and *sparingly*, can actually strengthen your essay (especially the ones I've posted for you on Blackboard). If you do choose to use secondary sources, you must use legitimate academic sources [i.e. not Sparknotes, Wikipedia, GradeSaver, blogs, etc.] and provide a 'Works Cited' page listing all of the sources you used even if they were not quoted directly (this includes all of the secondary literature I have provided for you on Blackboard). If you *only* use the primary text and the course notes on Blackboard, I will not require you to include a formal bibliography, *but you still must provide in-text citations* which make reference to the primary text. This midterm essay exam is, obviously, open notes (both yours and mine), open book, open internet, open library, etc., but please remember: if you plagiarize any part of this exam you will fail the course.

Your completed essay exam must be submitted in PDF format via email to grimwadr@stjohns.edu by 11:59pm on Friday, March 9, 2018. Please put your name in the title of the document - e.g. "FirstLast1.pdf" – and on the first page of the essay. [*Do not submit via Blackboard*].

ESSAY PROMPTS:

(1) **Explain, analyze, and interpret Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" from Book VII of *Republic*** (p.193-198; 514a-519b). What is Socrates trying to show Glaucon by presenting this allegory? And, by extension, what is Plato trying to show us as readers? How is the "allegory of the cave" an allegory for philosophical education and enlightenment? Explain some of the key symbols and metaphors used in the allegory: e.g. How are *most* human beings like prisoners in an underground cave? What does the inside of the cave symbolize? What do the "bonds" represent? What might the shadows on the cave wall represent or symbolize? What are the "artifacts"? Who are the puppeteers who hold these "artifacts"? What does the fire inside the cave symbolize? What does the world outside of the cave represent? Plato's Socrates tells us that the sun is "the *idea* of the good" (517c). What does he mean by this? What does he mean by "*idea*"? What is Plato's "Doctrine of Forms (or Ideas)"? How might the allegory of the cave relate to Plato's Doctrine

of Forms? What is *philosophy* according to Plato's Socrates? Who is the person who escapes the cave? What does his or her journey symbolize? Does the allegory have meanings which exceed the domain of Plato's epistemology and metaphysics? How might one use the allegory of the cave to critique contemporary social, political, and educational practices in the United States (or elsewhere)?

(2) Explain the so-called "function argument" as it is presented in Book I of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and explore its role in Aristotle's argument in Book X that the eudemonic life is (or substantially involves) the activity of philosophical contemplation. What is Aristotle trying to prove with the function argument? Is he showing us that contemplative thinking is a *necessary part* of a fulfilled life or is he claiming that thinking is the *only* activity which we ought to be engaging in? Is the function argument, as Aristotle presents it, logically valid and sound? What are some possible objections to the argument? How might Aristotle respond to these objections? Do you think that Aristotle is basically right about what constitutes the human animal difference (i.e. the ability to think)? Does the "function argument" support Aristotle's claim in Ch.7 of Book X that the "life of contemplation" (i.e. the philosophical life) is the eudemonic life? What *exactly* does Aristotle mean by "contemplation"? What is the difference between *Sophia* (wisdom *itself*) and *Phronēsis* (practical wisdom)? Why does Aristotle value philosophical contemplation so highly, given that according to his own account it is impractical and perhaps even "useless", by his own account? Is he right to do so? If so, why? If not, why not?

(3) Explain why Aristotle thinks that the life of philosophical contemplation is the best kind of life and develop your own vision of the fulfilled life in response to Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle attempts to show us (or his students) that *eudaimonia* ("happiness") is not merely a feeling or a momentary state of pleasure, but a fulfilled life involving *aretē* [excellence/virtue] in all activities and areas of life as well as intellectual pleasures and many other 'goods' that are worthy of rational choice. In Book X (starting Ch.7) he argues that philosophical "contemplation" is the highest and ultimate good and that the life of contemplation is the best kind of life, that is, a life which fully actualizes our human potential and which even seems to exceed a life that is *merely* human insofar as it reaches toward the divine. Explain why Aristotle thinks that the life of contemplation is the best life. What criteria of assessment does Aristotle use to determine what the highest good is, and, by extension, which way of life is best? What other "lives" and "goods" does Aristotle reject as candidates for the highest good and best way of living? Why does he reject them? What kind of life do *you* think would be truly eudemonic – excellent, fulfilled, successful, etc. – and how does this conception differ from the account given by Aristotle? What "goods" (of body, mind, etc.) do you think one *must* have or practice in order to have lived a fulfilled "eudemonic" life? Which goods do you think we should prioritize if we want to live a truly excellent, successful, fulfilling life? Defend your view.

(4) Explain and analyze Aristotle’s discussion of “excellences/virtues of character” and the doctrine of the moral “mean” in Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. How does one become *aretê* [virtuous/excellent] according to Aristotle? What is the difference between excellences of intelligence and excellences of character? Which particular excellences of character should we attempt to cultivate within ourselves (and encourage others to develop)? How is excellence of character cultivated? Is the activity of cultivating excellence of character something that *individuals* can do or can this only be done by societal institutions and governments? What is Aristotle’s doctrine of the moral “mean”? How does he define moral excellence or virtue [*aretê*] in action, feeling, and emotion? What examples does he use? How does the moral mean help us to *define* and understand what true excellence [*aretê*] of character is? What factors must we keep in mind to understand the moral mean and to apply it correctly in actual situations that we might face in life? How does cultivating an excellent character help us in our attempt to live the eudemonic life? In other words, how does this discussion tie in to the greater argument of *Nicomachean Ethics* concerning *eudaimonia* (“happiness” – the excellent, fulfilled life). Do you think that Aristotle’s moral mean is an *effective* explanation of what excellence of character *is*? Do you think that it is a helpful tool that we can use in our attempt to live an excellent and fulfilling life? If so, why? If not, why not?

(5) Examine and critically analyze Aristotle’s discussion of pleasure and his ultimate rejection of pleasure as the ultimate good of human life. In Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle dismisses the life of *sensual* (bodily) pleasure – i.e. the hedonistic life – as unfit to be a worthy candidate for the truly eudemonic life: he claims that the life of pleasure is “slavish” and “fit only for cattle” (1095b). In Book X, Aristotle returns to the topic of pleasure and discusses it far more extensively. Here he attempts to show that pleasure, while certainly not unequivocally “bad”, is *not* the *highest* good, even if the highest activity (contemplation) necessarily involves the highest form of pleasure. What is the reasoning behind his rejection of pleasure as the *highest* good? What does he say about the nature of pleasure(s)? Why does he reject the accounts given by other philosophers concerning pleasure as the highest and ultimate good and purpose of life? Which general types or kinds of pleasure does Aristotle favor? Is Aristotle right to reject the life of pleasure? Is he right to reject pleasure as the highest good? What, in your opinion, if anything, is *wrong* with hedonism (the pursuit of *bodily* pleasure) as a way of life? Why should or shouldn’t we seek out bodily pleasure in as many forms and as often as possible? Do you think that *some* pleasures (or kinds of pleasure) might, contra Aristotle, actually be viable candidates for the title of the highest good and that seeking them out might be the best way to live? If so, why? If not, why not?

(6) Explain and interpret Aristotle’s notion of “*philia*” - “friendship”, “social relationship”, “liking” – in Books VIII and IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and tie this discussion into the general argument of the *Nicomachean Ethics* concerning *Eudaimonia*. How does the meaning of the Greek term differ from the English word “friendship” (as it is most often used) and why is this

terminological difference especially important for a proper understanding of Aristotle's discussion of *philia*? What is friendship – in general – according to Aristotle? What are the *three* major species of *philia* according to Aristotle? Why does Aristotle consider the two incomplete forms of “friendship” to be incomplete? How *exactly* do each of the three forms differ from each other? What, if anything, do they have in common? Which type of “friendship” is the best according to Aristotle? *Why* is it the best? Why do we need “friends” according to Aristotle? Is Aristotle right about this? In other words, can a human being live a fulfilled life without any significant relationships with others – i.e. can one be a “happy hermit”? Is Aristotle's preliminary distinction between three species of friendship generally accurate in your view? Is there another species of friendship which he *ought* to have included that cannot be categorized under any of the three categories? What does Aristotle say about other kinds of social relationships which do not neatly fall under these three species – i.e. about familial relationships and those between people who are “unequal”? How ought we to “balance” these relationships so that they are fair and approximate the equality and mutual reciprocity of the complete friendship? Do you think that Aristotle is right about this (despite, *of course*, his sheer misunderstanding of the natural potential of women)? How does Aristotle's theory of friendship relate to the greater discussion of *eudaimonia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* – i.e. how does “friendship” help us to live a fulfilled and excellent life? Does his claim that the best kind of life is relatively “self-sufficient” conflict with his claim that friendship is necessary for all human beings? Use direct references to the text to support your interpretation.

(7) Explore the instrumental morality of rulers as it is presented in Machiavelli's *The Prince*. How does Machiavelli's instrumental and consequentialist view of morality challenge traditional conceptions of morality in the Western tradition? How does Machiavelli's concept of *virtú* differ from *areté* or “virtue” as it is traditionally understood (in a religious or secular context)? Why, according to Machiavelli, must the prince learn *not* to be good? What kinds of evil actions must the prince be able to do if he wants to gain and maintain power? What traditional virtues must he abandon or learn to reject? In *The Prince* Machiavelli only explicitly advocates such *virtú* for the prince (the ruler or aspiring ruler). Do you think that he also advocates such actions and values for people who are *not* in power? In other words, do you think Machiavelli is suggesting that *everyone* ought to act like this or only the ruler or leader of a society? Does Machiavelli only advocate such activities because he thinks they will lead to a greater “common good” or does he not believe in traditional morality at all? What would the world be like if everyone followed the advice that Machiavelli gives to the prince? Do you think that these are “good” values for a ruler to have? If so, why? If not, why not? Do you think that these values are good for an *individual* to have? If so, why? If not, why not? Do you think that Machiavellian values and activities will benefit a person *in the long run*? If so, why? If not, why not?

(8) Explain and Evaluate Machiavelli's famous claim that it is ultimately better for a ruler to be feared than to be loved. In Chapter 17 of *The Prince*

Machiavelli argues that *ideally* a leader should be *both* loved *and* feared if he wants to stay in power, but if only one of these alternatives is possible, then it is ultimately better to be feared (p.271). What arguments and examples does he provide to support these claims? What role does his rather dismal view of human nature play in these arguments? If Machiavelli thought more highly of human nature would he have argued for the same position? All things considered, do you think that Machiavelli is right to make such a claim? In other words, he is just being a “realist” when it comes to human nature or has he greatly underestimated our human potential to be more than merely self-concerned creatures? How might one challenge Machiavelli’s position? Would you want a president (or leader) with a “Machiavellian” disposition, that is, one who lies, manipulates, schemes, and basically does whatever is expedient to stay in power? If you were a powerful politician or “ruler” would you follow Machiavelli’s advice and put your own desire for power over the needs and wellbeing of your citizens? If you did this, would it benefit you in the long run? Would it benefit the state you ruled? Would it benefit the majority of citizens within your state? All things considered, if you were a ruler would you rather be feared or loved (assuming that you can’t have both)? Defend your answer.

(8) Explain the role of hyperbolic doubt in Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy*. How does hyperbolic (i.e. exaggerated) doubt differ from the ‘normal’ epistemological doubts that a person might reasonably entertain? How does Descartes use this hyperbolic doubt to undermine all previous philosophical and ‘common sense’ views about the nature of reality and knowledge? What is Descartes attempting to prove using this kind of extreme skepticism? In the First Meditation Descartes famously attempts to systematically doubt everything that he had previously believed and in the Second Meditation he claims to have found one point of indubitable certainty: “I am, I exist” (p.18). He claims that no matter how intense one’s skepticism, this claim can never be doubted by anyone of sane mind – i.e. that it is totally immune to even the most extreme, hyperbolic forms of skepticism. How, then, does Descartes *use* hyperbolic doubt in his attempt to arrive at this *absolutely certain* truth? What are the three waves (or phases) of hyperbolic doubt which Descartes deploys in the First Meditation? What is the evil demon (or “evil genius”) hypothesis and why does Descartes consider this to be the most hyperbolic of all possible skeptical doubts? Is Descartes’ method of discovering absolute certainty *reasonable* and *justifiable* in your view? In other words, is this extreme form of hyperbolic skeptical doubt an effective tool to use in an attempt to discover truths which one can be *absolutely certain* about? What, if anything, does Descartes *not* actually doubt when he claims to be doubting everything one can possibly doubt (using the evil demon hypothesis)? In other words, is there anything that Descartes still *presupposes* or *assumes* when he claims to be doubting *everything*? How does Descartes overcome his hyperbolic doubts and find one “Archimedean point” of certainty which *cannot* be doubted? Why can the infinitely powerful “evil demon” *not* convince Descartes that he (Descartes) does not exist? Do you think that Descartes *ever* successfully overcomes the hyperbolic skeptical doubts he proposed in the First Meditation? Can we *ever* escape such doubts? Can we know *anything for certain*? Do you

know for certain that you exist (in some state, shape, or form)? Is there *anything* that you can be certain about? Is there anything that you personally are so *absolutely certain* of that you would never doubt it no matter what? If so, is this 'truth' you are absolutely certain of immune to the kind of hyperbolic doubt that Descartes uses to undermine knowledge in his *Meditations*?

(9) Explain, analyze, and evaluate Descartes' "trademark argument" for the existence of God and his argument that God is not a deceiver in the Third Meditation of the *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Why is Descartes *compelled* to prove that God exists and is not a deceiver? Why is proving the existence of a truthful and good God the only way that Descartes can overcome the possibility of absolute skepticism ostensibly entailed by his hyperbolic doubt? What argument (or arguments) does Descartes offer for the existence of God in Meditation Three? What argument does he offer to prove that God is not a deceiver? Explain both arguments. Do you find Descartes' arguments to be convincing? What are some possible objections to his arguments? What role does God play in the philosophy of Descartes as it is presented in the *Meditations*? Why does Descartes *need* to prove that God exists and is not a deceiver? Could he have overcome his hyperbolic doubts without proving the existence of a non-deceiving God? Could he claim that his perceptions of the world are roughly "accurate" without this truthful omnipotent God to guarantee their veracity? What, if anything, could Descartes have been absolutely certain about *without* God? Optional: Do you think that Descartes' conception of God – i.e. how he defines and describes God – is adequate and satisfying from a theological perspective?

(10) Explain and assess Descartes' argument for why human beings, rather than God, are responsible for our own errors of judgment and the false or confused knowledge which arises from these judgments. In the Fourth Meditation of the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes claims that human beings are responsible for our own errors of judgment and he claims that it is our responsibility to curtail our power of judgment. He says that if we limit our judgments only to those objects and ideas which are "clear and distinct" then we will avoid all of the errors which give rise to mistaken conceptions and false knowledge. If God exists and is not a deceiver, as is claimed in the Third Meditation, then *how is error possible according to Descartes*? In other words, if God would *not* create a situation in which human beings are deceived by our senses and subjected to natural illusions (because he is all good and not a deceiver) then how is it possible that we are ever mistaken about anything? Since it is clear that human beings do make mistakes and often have incorrect or confused ideas about the world, then the onus is on Descartes to explain why errors of judgment are possible. What is it about human nature – and the finitude (or limitedness) of abilities and powers –, according to Descartes, that gives rise to errors of judgment? And why, according to Descartes, are errors of judgment *our fault*, and hence not God's fault? Do you think that some version of Descartes' account of the origin of error is a plausible? If so, why? If not, why not? Optional: If you are familiar with the theological "problem of evil", then explain how Descartes' argument for the origin of error mirrors the arguments

offered by Augustine, Aquinas, and/or others which attempt to solve the problem of evil by attributing it to free human choice.

(11) Explain and evaluate Hume's empiricist epistemology in the early chapters of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. What is an "impression"? What is an "idea"? What is the difference between impressions and ideas according to Hume? How exactly do we know the difference? What is a "simple idea"? What is a "complex idea"? Where do simple ideas originate and where do complex ideas come from? How do simple ideas relate to complex ideas? Is there such a thing as a "complex impression" or are all impressions "simple"? How does the human mind *function* according to Hume? What are its powers and abilities? What are the ways that it operates? What are the three laws of the "association of ideas" which Hume presents and discusses? (Be sure to provide examples of how these associative laws work). How does Hume's empiricist epistemology attempt to show that ideas we have in our minds ultimately arise from our sensory experience? What are some of the consequences of this view? E.g. What kind(s) of entities *are not* and *cannot* be known because they cannot possibly be experienced? Do you agree with Hume that there are there *only* three laws of cognitive association between ideas? Can you think of any others which cannot be reduced to Hume's three? (If you are having trouble with this question, try to follow your own train of thought and ask yourself how your thoughts were linked together). What problems, if any, arise from Hume's representationalist and empiricist theory of perception and knowledge? Is "force and vivacity" a sufficient criterion by which to judge the difference between impressions and ideas? Is Hume right to limit ideas to experienced impressions? Is "Hume's rule" [the limitation of ideas to experience] *reductive* in an unacceptable way? *Why* does Hume insist that all ideas must be derived from impressions? Which ideas, specifically, does Humean empiricism reject as illegitimate or fabricated? Would you be willing to accept Hume's claim that *all* knowledge is ultimately derived from sensory experience, and hence that what cannot possibly be perceived by the senses is unknowable and therefore not a legitimate object of knowledge? If so, why? If not, why not?

(12) [Challenge:] Explain Hume's skeptical critique of rationalist accounts of causality and the inductive inference in Chapters 4 and 5 of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Why does Hume reject all *rationalist* accounts of causality? And why does he reject the logical validity of the inductive inference? Every "law of nature" we know through experience and through scientific experiment (or "matter of fact") is thought to be justified by a rational process of induction. In other words, our knowledge of "matters of fact" is thought to be *guaranteed* by a process of reasoning which moves from repeated instances of an experienced particular state of affairs to a general rule or law of nature which governs all other similar states of affairs we experience. Hume famously shows that the so-called inductive inference which rationally justifies empirical knowledge of laws of nature is not grounded by any legitimate process of reasoning (whether inductive or deductive). Up to the present day, no one has been able to prove Hume wrong by showing how induction is

rationally grounded and yet we still learn from experience and we believe in the laws of nature which empirical science discovers. Why can we not *rationally* prove that causes produce effects or that effects arise from causes? Why, according to Hume, is the inductive inference not rational? How does our *belief* in causality *actually* originate according to Hume? In other words, how do we come to *believe* in causality *despite the fact that we cannot rationally prove that causality exists*? And why do we believe in the results of induction (laws derived from repeated experience and scientific observation) if induction is not based upon a demonstrable inference that is logically valid? Does Hume's critique of causality and/or induction entail that we should change any aspect of the way we live or our faith in the validity of the scientific method or knowledge that we gain from experience? What is Hume ultimately trying to show us about scientific claims and all knowledge derived from experience? What do you think his ultimate intention is?

(13) **Explain and evaluate Hume's argument about the impossibility of miracles in Chapter of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.** How does Hume define the term "miracle"? Why does Hume reject *all* of the accounts of miracles which we find in all religious and mythological texts? What are the major arguments he puts forward in support of his position? Do you agree with Hume's position? Do you think that his arguments are valid? If you disagree, please try to show where his argument fails. If you agree with Hume please show how his argument is effective and try to add additional arguments which Hume does not present that might support his position. How does Hume's discussion of the *testimony* about miracles relate to the general project of the *Enquiry* as you understand it? Does Hume's theory about the instinctive and habitual basis of all knowledge from experience ("matters of fact") make miracles, as he defines them, impossible? Is there a different way to understand miracles, which Hume doesn't acknowledge? In other words, might one define "miracle" differently than Hume? If you can think of a better definition, then try to defend it from Hume's arguments. If you think that Hume's definition is solid but his arguments are flawed, then explain *why* and *how* he is wrong. If you think his definition is right and his argument is sound, then apply it to some supposed "miracles" which are attested to by one of the major religious traditions of the world.

(14) **Create your own topic.** If you choose this option, you will need to have your topic approved by me before you write the essay. The procedure for this is simple. Email me your **topic proposal** and a few lines explaining what you will be analyzing, exploring, evaluating, or generally arguing about. I will need this topic proposal by **Friday** so that I will have time to develop questions for you to answer. When you are developing your topic please note that it must be substantially concerned with at least one of the texts we have read and discussed in class: Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave' in *Republic*; Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*; Machiavelli's *The Prince*; Descartes' *Meditations*; and/or Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. You may focus upon a specific problem raised in the text, compare, contrast, or synthesize two ideas from different texts, argue against a specific point raised by one of the

philosophers, or simply explain and evaluate a point raised in one of these texts that is *not covered by any of the prompts above*. In short, as long as it is directly relevant, complex, sophisticated, and interesting enough to demonstrate your mastery of the material, I will accept it. In the past, I have seen remarkably creative uses of these materials, so, if you understand the issues we have been discussing and the readings are (mostly) clear to you, I recommend this option.

Online Resources:

The Course Notes on Blackboard

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu>

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://www.iep.utm.edu>

MLA Handbook: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

University Resources:

Tutoring Center: <http://www.stjohns.edu/academics/centers/dass/learning>

Writing Center: <http://www.stjohns.edu/academics/centers/iws/writingcenter>

Library: <http://www.stjohns.edu/academics/libraries/>

If problems arise, email me at grimwadr@stjohns.edu **Good Luck!**