

Texts and Ideas: What is a Good Human Life?

Exposition and Analysis Paper Prompt

Paper Assigned:

Monday, September 20th

Paper Deadline:

Thursday, September 30th at 11:59pm

Response Paper Prompt: Argument Exposition and Analysis

There are two possible prompts, which both involve considering and comparing the views held by two of the thinkers we've covered in class:

OPTION 1: Socrates seems to articulate conflicting positions in the Apology and the Crito, respectively. That is, in the Apology he seems to argue that (29d-29e) even if released and acquitted on the condition he not practice philosophy, he would disobey the ruling of court. That is, even if the court offered to find him innocent so long as he changed his ways, he said he would take the deal but then continue to practice philosophy in the same way he had been before. But then, in the Crito, Socrates is offered a chance to escape his death sentence (a ruling of that same court) and continue doing philosophy elsewhere in Greece. Here, he gives a spirited argument that he should **not** disobey the ruling of the court, even if the ruling is unjust and even if the alternative is that he not be able live on and practice philosophy. These seem to be in direct conflict. Your assignment is:

- (1) Explain what Socrates's reasoning is in the relevant parts of the Apology, and what his arguments are in the Crito.
- (2) Are the two positions Socrates defends in these two works really inconsistent?
 - a) If yes, explain where the differences arise (i.e. what part of Socrates's arguments in one reading would be rejected by the Socrates of the other reading).
 - b) If no, explain how these two arguments can be made to be consistent. Why do they seem to conflict, and how can that conflict be removed?
- (3) Finally, do you agree with Socrates_{APOLLOGY} and/or with Socrates_{CRITO}? Which do you think makes the more compelling argument? If you wouldn't accept his conclusion, explain what about the argument fails to convince.

OPTION 2: In the Symposium, Socrates describes Diotima's arguments about what Love is and what it means to be a lover. Over the course of the argument, they give a brief sketch of the development of a "true lover" (Symposium 210a-212b). This is an unusual depiction of a lover since they seem to lose interest in loving people at all once they achieve a grasp of the highest/most pure object of love (the abstract form of Beauty, itself). I mentioned in class that this story relates to a very famous example that Socrates uses to explain the forms (and how they relate to the concrete, particular, worldly objects of our everyday experience) in the Republic, which is known as the Allegory of the Cave. Your assignment is:

- (1) Explain what Socrates's reasoning is in the relevant parts of the Symposium, and what the Allegory of the Cave is meant to communicate about how the physical world relates to the abstract Platonic forms.

- (2) How closely do these arguments relate? Where are the parallels? Why do Socrates and Diotima think that these abstract forms are superior to the ordinary particular objects/bodies/souls that we encounter in our daily lives?
- (3) Finally, do you think that the lover described in that portion of the Symposium would be a good lover? Do you think that the goal of “escaping” the cave lines up with Socrates’s broader claim (from the Apology) that the unexamined life is not worth living? Do you find the argument in the Symposium compelling? If you wouldn’t accept his and Diotima’s conclusion about the right way to love, explain what about the argument fails to convince.

General Advice for Answering the Prompts:

- (1) Lay out the arguments as clearly and concisely as possible.
 - a) Present the argument in plain language prose. Identify its premises and conclusion, then list the former and explain how they imply the latter.
 - b) Make explicit and presuppositions or principles which are not mentioned but must be accepted for the argument to go through.
 - c) Finally, explain what broader theory the argument is supporting or criticizing. Explain how the truth of its conclusion is supposed to support or (partially) refute that view.
- (2) When analyzing the reading and making comparisons, focus on the ideas presented...
 - a) That is, the specifics of Socrates’s wording won’t be as important as making sure you have a clear and concise description of what he’s trying to communicate.
 - b) When comparing one reading to another, you should identify major points of agreement, and only focus on disagreements that are relevant to answering the questions in your prompt.
- (3) If you describe an objection to an argument, or decide that the argument should be rejected...
 - a) Explain how the objection works. That is, explain what premise or suppressed presupposition the objection conflicts with.
 - b) Explain why and how the rejection of that premise or presupposition means that the remaining premises are no longer enough to ensure the conclusion's truth (that is, explain why, if the premises targeted by the objection are rejected, then the truth of the conclusion is no longer guaranteed, even if the other premises are true).
- (4) Minimize the use of quotations! Since you are comparing texts, you will likely have to cite certain parts to justify your claims. However, you should focus on giving a *clear* and *concise* explanation of the views presented in the relevant parts of the readings, rather than just quoting them.
 - a) As a rule: you should never include a quote that is more than a single sentence long. If there’s something said that takes more than a sentence, you should explain it yourself.
 - b) WHENEVER you use a quote, you must immediately follow the quote with an explanation, entirely in your own words, of what this quotation means and how it relates to the point you’re trying to make in that part of your paper.

Formatting and Length requirements:

- Pages: 3 to 5 pages (hard limit). If your paper is shorter than the minimum, you probably haven't explained your points thoroughly enough. I will stop reading at the end of the maximum

number of pages, so if your paper is longer than the maximum, then the last parts of it won't get read by me (and I will grade your paper based only on the parts I read).

- Double-spaced, 1" margins (all sides), 12 point font (Times New Roman, Calibri, Liberation Serif, or some other inoffensive, normal-proportioned, font). Letter-sized or A4 paper formatting.
- No excessive introduction or conclusion. You do not need any "hook" or other extra sentences at the beginning to lead up to the argument you're discussing. You should immediately start your discussion, without any unnecessary scene-setting.
- Must be in .pdf, .doc, .docx, or .odt format.
- There are no requirements for citation formatting. However, you should make it clear whose views you are discussing and, if you do choose to use quotes or otherwise reference parts of a paper directly, you should indicate what reading and what sections you're referring to.
 - When referencing translations of Plato, don't use page numbers (if you can help it). Instead, you can use the numbers and letters in the margins of the main text to refer to specific segments of the reading. Here's how that works: You should use the closest number and the closest letter that is *above* the line you're quoting. For example, in the Apology, Socrates says "the unexamined life is not worth living" around 38a ('38' because it's below the '38' and 'a' because it's above the 'b'). The paragraph where Socrates describes the charges recommended by the prosecution, and then instead suggests the "punishment" of free meals at the Prytaneum runs from 36b to 37a.

In your paper, you would cite this as: (Apology 36b-37a)

Who is Your Audience?

- *NOT* me (I know too much about the material).
- *NOT* a layperson who hasn't taken any philosophy (they know too little about how philosophy papers work to understand what you're doing).
- Rather, consider your audience an old roommate of yours, who was a philosophy major, but who never took this particular class.

This roommate knows what words like necessary and sufficient mean, and understands what arguments, premises, and conclusions are, but they probably don't know what is said in any of the readings.

Moreover, this is a roommate whose seen you in embarrassing situations in the past, and so won't be impressed if you write using high-falutin language to make yourself sound fancy and smart (or to disguise when you're not sure about what you're saying, which is what that language is usually used for). Rather, you should just explain everything as simply and clearly as possible, so they won't have anything to make fun of you about.

Grading Standards

The prompt is on the previous pages. What follows are my grading standards (so you know what to aim for in your assignment). These are the exact standards I will use to grade your paper.

Minimum Requirements to *Pass*:

- A) Your topic should be one of the two prompts provided, above.
- B) Your paper should engage actively with the readings, but not be either a self-contained argument or a stand-alone part of a series of arguments for a specific positive view advocated for by the author.
- C) Your paper must answer all of the questions indicated in the prompt and must do so in a clear and easy-to-follow way.
- D) Your paper should avoid using excessive quotes, and avoid using very long quotes. Every quotation should be accompanied by a prose explanation of what that quote says and what its significance is for the point you're making in that section of the paper.

Requirements to Get a *Good* Grade:

To get a good grade (rather than just a passing one), you must follow the prompt in a clear and organized way. Specifically, you must explain yourself clearly, thoroughly, in a focused way, and in a way that's accurate to the content of the reading or of the argument you're considering.

These conditions are listed in order of importance:

- ***Clarity*** is the most important feature I'll be looking for. It must be evident to your reader what each sentence means, and what purpose the terms you are using are playing.
- ***Thoroughness*** is the second most important feature, and it also contributes to clarity. Your paper should explain your point in sufficient detail and with sufficient care that the connections between, e.g., the premises of the argument and the objection, are as explicit as possible.
- ***Focused writing*** is the third most important feature, though it also contributes to clarity and thoroughness. Your writing should not bring in irrelevant details or extra information or technical terms which do not contribute to your reader's understanding of the argument, objection, or response. You should come into each paragraph or sentence knowing what point you want to make and remove any excess or rhetorical flourishes.
- ***Accuracy to the content*** of your reading, and of your chosen argument is the last thing I'll look for. While it is important to get the material right, it's *much* more important to be clear, thorough, and focused in your explanation. Indeed, your paper will be better (and receive a better grade) if you openly acknowledge that you aren't sure how to understand a certain step in an argument or objection, but can hazard two or three possible understandings, and then clearly, thoroughly, and in a focused way explain those possibilities and what their significance is.

A note on what's ***NOT*** important to getting a good grade: At no point will I evaluate whether you, in your paper, "won" the debate. There are no points awarded for showing that an objection to your preferred view is false and confused, or for showing that the objection to a view you disagree with absolutely demolishes it. Philosophy is not about winning arguments, it's about clearly and carefully laying out the logical relations between certain claims, and using those connections to better understand the world. If your paper "wins" the argument, but does so by ignoring or underplaying the significance of a legitimate point which would be inconvenient for your preferred view, then your paper is sacrificing all four of the above virtues in exchange for a meaningless feeling of victory, and will be graded accordingly.