

Political philosophy and brief critical evaluation



Sample essay questions

1. Describe Plato's scheme for communism in the Republic. (Discuss each of the main features of this life-style.) Which classes, according to Plato, should practice this way of living? What justification does Plato offer for advocating communism? Offer a brief critical evaluation of Plato's communism. PHL 107 | study guide for exam 2 | page 4
2. (1) Briefly describe Plato's allegory of the cave. (2) Then state how the allegory expresses Plato's position on (a) the place of the Philosopher-Kings in Plato's utopia, (b) Plato's distinction between opinion and genuine knowledge (wisdom), and (c) Plato's position on the motives of the Philosopher-Kings for ruling.
3. (1) What is Plato's dualistic metaphysics? (2) How is this metaphysics expressed in the allegory of the cave? (3) How is it related to his position on the nature of the human person?
4. (1) What is Plato's assessment of democracy, and (2) how is this linked to his theory of justice? (3) How might a contemporary defender of democracy respond to Plato?
5. What is the mimetic theory of art? Did Plato invent this theory? Did he accept it? How is this theory related to Plato's criticisms of the arts?
6. (1) What two reasons does Plato give for proposing to banish the arts from his Republic? (2) How is his position on the arts related (a) to his Theory of Ideas and (b) his position on the highest goal of human living? (3) Offer a brief critical evaluation of Plato's position on the arts.
7. (1) What does Rawls mean by "the original position . . . under the veil of ignorance" and how does this serve as the basis for his theory of justice? (2) What are his two principles of justice? Explain the two principles. (3) Offer a brief critical evaluation of his theory of justice.
8. (1) Starting with Rawls' "original position . . . under the veil of ignorance," do you think you would arrive at a principle or principles of justice similar to those of Rawls, or if different ones, which? Defend your

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position. (2) As part of your answer give a clear statement of what Rawls means by the " original position . . . under the veil of ignorance. "

9. (1) What is Aquinas's causal argument for the existence of God (the 2nd of his five arguments)? Sketch the argument. (2) Critically evaluate the argument. What appears to be the weakest part of the argument? Do you think the argument can be defended in the face of this proposed weakness? Explain.

10. (1) What is the design argument for the existence of God? You may present either Aquinas's (his 5th) or William Paley's or the fine-tuning version of the argument (but only one). (2) Why does Darwin's theory of evolution appear to undermine Aquinas and Paley's version of the design argument? Why does Darwin's theory not affect the fine-tuning argument? (3) Do you think that there is some way of salvaging the design argument in the face of Darwin's theory? Defend your position.

11. Describe Hobbes' " state of nature. " What kind of a concept is this - historical, empirical, anthropological, analytic? Explain. Offer your own critical evaluation of Hobbes' notion of the state of nature? Do you think it is a useful concept? Is it true? Defend your position.

12. Hobbes argues that each person has the resources within themselves to overcome the state of nature.(1) What are these resources and how do they help the person to overcome the state of nature? (2) But why, for Hobbes, are these internal resources insufficient? Why is a very strong sovereign also needed to overcome the state of nature? (3) What role does contract or covenant play in overcoming the state of nature?