Arts One 2016: Seeing and Knowing

Essay Topics, Plato’s *Republic*

Please note: while Socrates is a real historical person with his own philosophical views, he is used by Plato to expound strictly Platonic positions. Please assume that in all questions, Socrates speaks only for Plato.

1. How would Plato evaluate the state of Oedipus’ soul and the nature of his rule? Be sure to use evidence from both *Oedipus The King* and *Republic*.

2. Plato says that certain stories are not suitable for young people to hear. Use specific examples from *Republic* to evaluate his position.

3. Explain and evaluate Plato's arguments for the use of falsehoods in the service of the just society.

4. What account does Plato offer regarding gender roles and gender relations in the kallipolis? Evaluate his account in the context of his own view of the just society.

5. What is it about philosophers as described by Plato that makes them uniquely qualified to rule? What does he (and they) see that others do not? If you wish, you may also evaluate his view.

6. What role does the Myth of Er play with respect to the argument of the *Republic* as a whole? Does the use of this myth present any challenges to Plato’s argument that justice is its own reward?

7. Plato argues that imitative poets should be banished from the ideal state. How, then, can we account for his own extensive use of images, symbols, allegories, and other poetic devices in *Republic*?

8. Evaluate Plato’s treatment of poetry and the performing arts in *Republic*.

9. Plato condemns the political model of Thrasymachus on the grounds that its rulers educate and govern by coercive force for personal advantage. Does anything prevent us from drawing the same conclusion about Plato?

10. Does the delivery of Plato’s argument in the form of a philosophical dialogue between characters add anything to the content of his argument in *Republic*? What if anything would be lost without Plato’s cast of characters?

11. Examine Plato’s treatment of sight, both metaphorical and physical, and the role it plays in his larger argument in *Republic*.

12. Critics often condemn Plato’s *Republic* for its attack on liberty and equality. Using evidence from *Republic,* argue for how Plato views these concepts.

13. On the one hand Plato argues that knowledge entails understanding the visually incomprehensible forms. On the other hand he privileges the visual as the sense through which we gain knowledge. Discuss this apparent contradiction with textual support from *Republic*.