

### *Oedipus Topics (1)*

1. To what extent does Oedipus represent a philosopher, Greek or otherwise? Follow the theme of knowledge and inquiry throughout the play. Who knows what? Who does not know what he thinks he knows -- and why does he not know it?
2. To what extent is Oedipus responsible for what he does and what he has done? Perhaps more importantly, how much control (or "autonomy," to use the Greek derivative) does Oedipus think he has?
3. The play is very heavy on dramatic irony. (Dramatic irony is when a character says something which has more significance than he recognizes, a significance the audience nonetheless understands.) Make a list of as many different sorts of this irony as you can find in this tragedy.
4. Notice the themes of abandonment, betrayal, and expulsion, especially as they concern Oedipus. By whom has he really been betrayed, abandoned, or expelled? Whom does he mistakenly think to have done this, or to be about to do this, to him? In the end, who expels Oedipus -- and how is this related to Q.2 above?

### *Apology Topics*

As you read or review Plato's "Apology," consider in what ways Socrates is similar to or different from Oedipus. Pay special attention to their relationships with the divine and with knowledge. Additionally, here are three interpretive puzzles of the "Apology" that I would like you to try to solve as you prepare for tomorrow's class:

1. Socrates famously says (21b4-5), "I've no claim to being wise in anything either great or small." But just before this (20d7-8) he says: "I've acquired this reputation because of nothing other than a sort of wisdom." How can these statements be reconciled?
2. Socrates repeatedly presents himself as a servant of Apollo (23a4-c1,28d6-29a1,29b6-7,30a5,31a7-b1,33c4-7,37e5-38a6), ordered to improve the souls of the Athenians. But he also testifies that he has never been anyone's teacher (33a5-6). In light of this apparent paradox, how can he be right on both accounts?
3. Socrates claims that wisdom is necessary for virtue (29e5-30a1), and in (1), above, we have seen his disavowal of wisdom. But he often implies that he is virtuous (30c6-d1,34e3-35a1,36b9-c1,36d1-3,36d9-e1,37a5-6,37b2-4,41c8-d2). How should we interpret his claim about virtue, especially his own?

### *Symposium Topics*

Notice the ways in which the last two speeches -- of Diotima/Socrates, and of Alcibiades -- appropriate ideas from the earlier ones. More specifically, answer these two questions:

1. To what extent does the speech of Diotima (or Socrates) synthesize the best of what has already been proposed by the earlier accounts of Love?
2. What role has Socrates played in the love-life of Alcibiades? How can this role be analyzed according to the accounts of love that have preceded his speech?

### *Philebus Topics*

We saw in the "Symposium" how Socrates extolled the Beautiful and thereby the Good, but that he never told us what this Good was. In fact, as I mentioned in class, Plato signals this omission when he has Socrates about to eulogize Agathon ("Good"), only to have Alcibiades and his revellers interrupt. So the "Philebus" turns to this question: What is the Good? The two most popular candidates are immediately canvassed: pleasure and knowledge. I would like you to consider the following questions as you finish and then review the dialogue:

1. What different methods does Socrates articulate in order to resolve this question? In other words, what is his "Dream" and what are the four-fold types of being?
2. What critiques of pleasure does Socrates offer? How can pleasure be false? How can it be true? Are these critiques successful? Be prepared to say why or why not.
3. What analysis does he offer of knowledge?
4. What does the Good turn out to be? Specifically, what are the roles of pleasure and knowledge in the Good?

### *Epicureanism Topics*

1. How is Epicurus' physical theory continuous with the Presocratic philosophy of Atomism (i.e., of Leucippus and Democritus)? What are the main tenets of Epicurus' atomism? Are there any internal inconsistencies in these tenets?

2. To what extent is Epicurean atomism successful in explaining the following phenomena: change, perception, the soul, death, and the gods? What criticisms might you make of one or more of these explanations?
3. What utility does Epicurus think physical investigations have for the practical life with which his philosophy is primarily concerned? In other words, what use is there in understanding the explanations mentioned in Q.2 above?
4. Since we have already discussed pleasure in some detail from the "Philebus," pay special attention to the Epicurean theory of pleasure. What is this theory? How does it differ from Plato's analysis? Also, what is the relationship of pleasure with virtue, justice, and friendship?

### *Stoicism Topics*

1. What is Stoic theology? Why do they treat god under the rubric of "physics"? With what else do they identify god? What is the relationship between god and the cosmos?
2. What is Stoic psychology? What sort of thing is the soul? What are the arguments which lead them to adopt this view of it? Are these arguments sound? What is the relationship between reason and passion?
3. What is Stoic ethics? By what standard must a Stoic live his life? What is the relationship between this standard, god, and the soul? What is the Stoic understanding of pleasure? What role does pleasure play in the good life? Finally, what role do politics play in this life?
4. What are the differences and similarities of Epicureanism and Stoicism? As a class we will compile a list of these, so please have several ready; I will ask each student to contribute one to this list, so try to notice some out-of-the-way points as well as the obvious.

### *Skepticism Topics*

1. What are the ten skeptical "modes" and what role do they play in skeptical thought? Particularly, how do they challenge the basic epistemological presupposition of both Epicureanism and Stoicism?
2. What are the skeptical arguments against all demonstration, criterion, sign, cause, induction, motion, place, and something being good or bad by nature? From which ancient philosophers have some of these arguments been drawn, and (for the philosophy majors among you) which modern philosophers would later draw upon them in turn?

3. How is the Pyrrhonian skepticism taught by Sextus Empiricus different from the apparently similar philosophies of Heraclitus, Democritus, Protagoras, and the so-called 'Academic' skeptics?

4. How does Lucretius criticize Skepticism? (Notice that his criticism was already in the Epicurean maxims: XXIII and XXIV.) How does Sextus reply to this criticism by the careful way in which he formulates the creed of skepticism? Who has the upper hand in this dispute, Lucretius or Sextus? In other words, is the skeptical posture tenable?

5. What are the general skeptical criticisms of theology? What are the specific arguments for gods' existence which Sextus entertains? What are his criticisms of these arguments? What are the four arguments he raises against all current notions of the divine?

### *Socrates and Hellenism*

Now that we have introduced the three major Hellenistic schools, please answer the following question: How do the complex elements of Socrates (both his character and his philosophy) survive into this period? For each of the schools (Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Skepticism), note two different Socratic elements (six elements in total). This simple assignment is meant to prompt you not only to review some of the material that may appear on your midterm this Friday, but also to recognize the debt of later Greek philosophy to Socrates.

### *Fate Topics*

1. What "Fatalist" (or "Determinist") argument does Aristotle first consider? (Diodorus Cronos later called this the Master Argument.) What absurdities does he think the Master Argument's conclusion creates for practical life? How does he challenge and reject this argument?

2. For which two reasons did Epicureans introduce the "swerve." According to Cicero, how did Chrysippus criticize this odd doctrine? (Notice how he and many other Stoics exploit the Master Argument for their own brand of fatalism.) How did Carneades criticize the swerve?

3. What was Chrysippus' doctrine of "co-fated events"? What was his distinction between "perfect and principal causes," on the one hand, and "auxiliary and proximate causes," on the other? What was his concept of "rollability" and his analogy to cones and cylinders? How did this ingenious mix of doctrine, distinction, and analogy function in his approach to the problem of fate?

4. How did Augustine appropriate Carneades' critique of Epicurus' swerve for his own philosophical purposes? What new version of the Master Argument confronts the omniscient God of Christianity, and how does Augustine criticize it? Is he successful, for example, in explaining the paradox of prayer-to-an-omniscient-God? How does his explanation borrow from Chrysippus?

### *Time Topics*

1. What are the three problems about time adduced by Aristotle? Which accounts of time does he consider and why does he reject them? What is the account he develops, and what are his reasons for preferring it?

2. What agreement do Stoics and Epicureans share about time? How do they disagree about it? What contradiction did Plutarch find in Chrysippus' discussions of time?

3. Sextus Empiricus offers a handy list of his predecessors' definitions of time. All of them assume that time exists, but Sextus offers four arguments to the effect that time does not exist. What are his arguments, and are they sound? What is the ultimate position of Sextus on time?

4. How does Augustine appropriate the Hellenistic arguments about time for his Christian purposes? Does he merely recycle old thoughts -- putting old wine into new skins -- or does he develop new ones of his own?

### *Plotinus Topics (1)*

1. Plotinus rejects the definition of beauty as the symmetrical and proportional by deploying five objections to it; what are they? What account of beauty does he offer instead? What echoes of Plato's "Symposium," and indeed of the other middle dialogues of Plato, do you hear in this account?

2. What two reasons does Plotinus offer for supplementing his notion of the Soul by introducing the Intelligence? What echoes of Aristotle's psychology and theology do you hear in these reasons? How does the Intelligence bring things into being? What echoes of Aristotle's account of causation do you hear in Plotinus' account of the cosmos and change?

3. What two reasons does Plotinus offer to explain the descent of the soul? How are these reasons related to the two explanations of descent he cites from Plato? Are Plotinus' two reasons (or for that matter Plato's) consistent with one another? How does the conflict between fate and free-will emerge as a problem at this point?

4. Why does Plotinus posit the One? What is the relationship between the One, the Intelligence, Being, and the Soul? According to Plotinus, what can and cannot be said of the One? Which problems do these strictures impose upon Plotinus' philosophical thought and writings? What measures does he recommend us to adopt in order that we may behold the One? What happens to us if ever we reach this pinnacle of contemplation?

### *Plotinus Topics (2)*

1. Why is it that a soul which desires material things debases itself? Why is The Soul eternal? In what activity does The Soul find its fulfillment? To repeat a question from yesterday, this time with more insight: what is the relationship between The Soul and The Intelligence?

2. How and why does multiplicity arise from The One? First of all, in what sense do things "arise" from the One: in time or in eternity? Secondly, what does it mean to claim, as Plotinus does, that perfection is directly proportional to productivity? Is this true? What analogies does he use to illustrate the procession of Hypostases?

3. What is a Hypostasis? (Feel free to consult the glossary at the end of the book.) What is the relationship between the Three Hypostases and the human soul? Which metaphor does Plotinus use to explain this difficult relationship? How can we become more aware of the Hypostases?

4. How does Plotinus define virtue? (Incorporate into your answer his notions of withdrawal, purification, and likeness.) Which two senses of likeness does he distinguish? According to which sense must we become "like" the divine? What is the difference between virtue in The Soul and virtue in The Intelligence? What is the relationship between the civic and the higher (or contemplative) virtues?

### *Plotinus Topics (3)*

1. In class lately we have discussed the nature of philosophy and your reasons for studying it. How may Plotinus' portrait of dialectic supplement our discussion? What is the goal of dialectic? What are the three types of men to whom it may address itself? Which feature of Plato's "Symposium" does this typology recall?

2. How are individual souls related to The Soul? As parts of It? If so, what are the many ways in which something can be a part of a whole? (As always with Plotinus, pay special attention to the metaphors he chooses.) Which way does Plotinus favor as the proper way for the relationship of souls and The Soul?

3. What new reason does Plotinus offer to explain the descent of souls? What

new explanations of evil does he offer? In other words, how does he elaborate his theodicy?

4. Plotinus entertains the popular notion that the soul is "in" the body. What are the many metaphors he considers to illustrate the idea, and which problems does he find with each? What alternate account of the soul-body relation does he offer? Is it tenable?

5. Why is Plotinus so concerned to explain memory? What problem does it pose to his system, especially his eschatology? How does he attempt to deal with this problem? Is he successful?

### *Augustine Topics (1)*

1. What debt does Augustine's thought -- generally, but especially on the three levels of reality -- owe to Plotinus (and thereby to the Stoics, Aristotle, Plato, and Pythagoras)?

2. How does Augustine define goodness? How may this definition be seen as a fusion of Plotinus and Plato's "Philebus"? Correlatively, how does his definition of evil differ from theirs? Specifically, what is his assessment of "Hyle"? Is this assessment coherent? What are some problems with Augustine's pair of definitions for good and evil? Does he solve these problems?

3. Recall why Augustine removed God from time. How similar or different is this strategy to Plotinus' removal of The One from time? Which problems does this strategy solve? Which new ones does it incur? How successful is Augustine in addressing and solving these new problems?

4. What is man: soul, body, or both? What is the good of the body? What that of the soul? What of both? Augustine introduces a new argument to conclude that moral evil stems from bad will, and thus not from fate. Is it sound?

### *Augustine Topics (2)*

1. Augustine claims of memory, understanding, and will, that "all are mutually comprehended by each." What are his arguments for this claim? Are they sound? What importance does memory, especially, have for Augustine's philosophy?

2. What is paradoxical about the following three facts: (a) the memory of sorrow can evoke joy, (b) we can remember oblivion, and (c) we can remember things forgotten. How does Augustine propose to resolve these paradoxes? How does his resolution of the third echo Plato? Why is Augustine so concerned to account for memory? How much does his account owe to Plotinus?

3. How does Augustine invert the epistemic revolution of the Milesians? Is this inversion a mere regression, or has any philosophical progress been made in the intervening millenium?

4. How does Augustine anticipate the famous argument that has been naively attributed to Descartes: cogito, ergo sum? Does Augustine's version differ at all from the one which most think gave birth to modern philosophy? How is the introspection of this argument consonant with the tone of his times -- a tone to which Plotinus also gave voice?

### *Oedipus Topics (2)*

1. How has Oedipus remained the same since we last read of him at the end of the OT? More importantly, how has he changed? Specifically, how does he relate differently to other people, the gods, his fate, knowledge and sight -- not to mention himself? What has he come to "see"?

2. What happens to Oedipus at the end of this "tragedy"? What sense can we make of this strange event?

3. How do the extraordinary events of Oedipus' life, and the lessons he learns by living it, forecast the extraordinary history of ancient philosophy? Did it take the philosophers a millenium to understand the teachings already implicit in the writings of one long-dead tragedian?