

Maximum length: 1500 words
Due: Saturday, December 2nd, 5 p.m.
in your conference leader's Eliot Hall mailbox.

- Topic 1** How do Plato's *Republic* and Euripides' *Bacchae* conceive of and respond to the irrational?
- Topic 2** Plato's *Republic*, Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* appear to embrace views of the relation between the sexes that are more egalitarian than the views found in the earlier works of Homer and, especially, Hesiod. Focussing on two of the later works, describe the ways in which they suggest a more egalitarian view, and the limits of their egalitarianism.
- Topic 3** Characterize Plato's theory of the structure of the soul, as given in the second half of Book Four of the *Republic*. What are Plato's arguments for this theory? Are they good? (In considering this question, try to focus on considerations that do not appeal to modern science.) *Turn the page for a suggested framework for evaluating an argument.*
- Topic 4** In books three (esp. 392c5–398b5) and ten (esp. 595–608c) of the *Republic*, Socrates offers a critique and rather negative assessment of mimesis (imitation). Yet, in various ways, Plato as author, and Socrates as character, make use of images and imitation. An important example is the "line" analogy in book 6 (509d and following), which can plausibly be considered an *image* in the Platonic sense of the term. How do you reconcile the apparent internal inconsistencies between Socrates' view about mimesis, and his own (and Plato's) uses of it to make arguments? Focus on one or two specific instances, and in each case make clear the specific relationship between Plato's theoretical statement on mimesis and his practice.
- Topic 5** In consultation with your conference leader, write on a topic of your own devising.

A framework for evaluating an argument

Here is a good framework to follow for writing a short paper that evaluates an argument.

- A. Identify the argument's premises and show how the conclusion is supposed to follow from the premises.
- B. Develop in rigorous detail a single objection to the argument. (For example, one could argue that the conclusion does not follow from the premises of the argument. Or one could argue that one of the premises is false.)
- C. Develop in rigorous detail the strongest response you think the author of the argument could give to your objection.
- D. Explain why you think the response is satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

Here are some semi-technical terms used in analyzing arguments: An argument consists of *premises* and a *conclusion*; the premises are the support, and the conclusion is the thing supported. There are two main virtues an argument can have, called *validity* and *soundness*. Validity has to do with the support *relationship*, considered in abstraction from questions about actual truth; soundness has to do also with actual truth.

An argument is *valid* if it is logically guaranteed that *were the premises true*, the conclusion would be true as well. Put another way: an argument is valid if it is impossible for the premises to be true while the conclusion is false. Put yet another way: an argument is valid if its conclusion *follows from* its premises.

An argument is *sound* if both (1) it is valid, and (2) its premises are actually true.

Note that, given these definitions, if an argument is sound, then its conclusion is true. (Think this through.) Hence it is irrational to accept the premises of an argument, to accept that the argument is valid, and to reject the conclusion.

An argument can include sub-arguments: what functions as a *premise* in the larger argument is the *conclusion* of a sub-argument.