

English and Cultural Studies 3Q03E
Cultural Studies and Critical Theory 3Q03E



Anselm Feuerbach, *Plato's Symposium* (1869)

History of Critical Theory: Representation, Education, and the Question of the Just Community

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MIDTERM EXAMINATION FORMAT & STUDY TIPS

The midterm examination for this course will be written in class Monday 21 October 2013, 7:00-7:50 pm. The exam will be 50 minutes in duration. There will be one essay question. The midterm will examine your knowledge of all of the assigned materials by Plato and Aristotle, i.e., the selections from Plato's *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, plus Aristotle's *Poetics*. There will be no class after the midterm examination.

It's only natural to feel apprehensive about a midterm. But try your level best *not* to think of the midterm negatively as something fearful, but positively as an opportunity to demonstrate how much thinking we've done together, how much good work you've devoted to the course, and how closely you've engaged the course materials and guiding questions. Moreover, by consolidating the course materials you lay the groundwork for writing your essay and your final examination. It's also a great opportunity to reflect upon your current study habits (Am I taking good notes? Am I reading the materials? Am I attending class?) and to modify those habits where necessary. The midterm examination gives Andrew and me a snapshot of where you are in the course, how you are "faring." (Recall Aristotle's use of the Greek word *praxis* or *action*,

meaning, as I said in class, *how things are going for you, how you are doing amid all the goings-on of the course*).

Here are a few suggestions regarding your preparations for the exam:

- * Read all the assigned course materials with care, soaking up both their local details and their large arguments and pressing worries.
- * Connect what was said in class to details and arguments of the assigned materials.
- * If you missed a week of the course, it would be good idea to borrow good notes from others.
- * Use the *Study Questions and Course Blog* document as a tool to help ensure a detailed comprehension of the course and lecture materials.
- * Carefully consider the course's major themes and lines of inquiry. The course outline is a good place to begin that consideration. What specific questions and problems connect the assigned materials? In what ways do Aristotle and Plato pose and investigate these questions and problems similarly and differently?

When writing the exam:

- * Avoid making large generalizations based on things you heard in class and instead move quickly and repeatedly from the lectures to specific details. The *Study Questions and Course Blog* document is designed to help you make those connections and to keep you focussed.
- * Consistently ground your claims in particular details and examples drawn from the assigned texts. The object here is to support your claims and to convey that you have read the assigned texts with care, and are therefore familiar with their arguments, terms, and examples. In other words, demonstrate that you have read the assigned texts by being able to refer to the particular arguments, illustrations, terms, and turns in those texts. Being able to demonstrate that you've listened carefully in class and taken good notes is a great first step. But Andrew and I will also be looking for evidence that you've also read the assigned materials, and that you've linked what was said in class to what Plato and Aristotle actually say in their texts.
- * Start many of your sentences with the phrase, "For example." This way you turn your exam answer towards those specific details.
- * Your sentences should be rich with particular details. For example, you might write:

“War is a theme to which Plato turns several times in the *Republic*. For example, the dialogue takes place in the home of Cephalus, an arms-maker for the Greeks; Socrates several times evokes the battle exploits of the great Greek hero, Achilles; Socrates’s main interest is in the proper education of the soldiers whose purpose it is to defend Athenians against their enemies; and the *Republic* is staged historically as taking place in a lull between the wars, a time that Plato’s own contemporaries knew was only a brief respite before Athens was overcome with violence once again.

Or: “Aristotle shows that he isn’t afraid of dramatic mimesis by his example. He tarries closely with tragedies, fascinated with what makes them tick, unbothered by their supposedly seductive trickery or what Socrates calls their “charm.” For example, Aristotle pays attention to the deep connection between what a tragedy is about and how that tragedy unfolds. He calls this element of tragedies *plot*. Indeed, he says that plot is “the *soul* of tragedy,” more important than character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song, the other five elements that go into the *making* or construction of effective tragic dramas. Now, some plots have a greater effect on their audiences than others, so Aristotle is careful to rehearse for his students what works better or worse, and why. Let me point to several kinds of plots that interest Aristotle and why he rejects them: first, . . .”

- * Don't forget to answer the question! I.e., carefully consider the particular focus of the midterm examination question. Be careful not to put down on paper everything that you know about Plato and Aristotle. Instead, route what you know through the particular focus of the midterm examination question. Use the exam question to organize your thoughts and focus your response. Answer the question at hand.
- * Remember to pace yourself: i.e., ensure that you devote as much time and effort to each of the thinkers you are discussing. Bring a watch.
- * Begin by taking a deep breath. Compose yourself. You've attended classes, done the readings, taken good lecture notes, thought rigorously about the arguments at hand, and considered the ways in which the lectures spring from the readings and the readings inform the lectures. Now is an opportunity to demonstrate your commitment to your own education and to grappling with the questions and problems that quicken the course.

Andrew and I very much look forward to reading your examinations!