

**PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE**  
**ANSWERS AND FREQUENT MISTAKES**

*Midterm – October 2021*

**General remarks:**

- The point distributions mentioned below are indications: grading is not an exact-mathematical exercise
- Final grade for this midterm is the weighted average of the partial grades for questions 1 (30%), 2 (30%) and 3 (40%), plus a +3,5% correction for the curve.
- General indication of partial grades: what can I improve? (NB: this applies especially for the longer question 3)
  - *Insufficient (< 5,5)*
    - Either crucial/essential elements are missing from this answer, or the quality of writing is substandard to a degree that essential information is not understandable enough. Find the solution in studying more and in more detail for the exam, and/or seeking help with writing
  - *Sufficient (5,5 < 7)*
    - Usually these answers contain the minimal/essential information, but either not very well/clearly written or not very thoroughly explained. Two possible solutions: do you write neatly and clearly? Is your story logically constructed, do you use paragraphs, are your sentences clear and error-free? If so: are you going too quickly? Do you perhaps *mention* the right things but forget to explain in depth what they mean?
  - *Good (7 < 8,5)*
    - All minimal/essential information is explained clearly. Here you can look for improvement either in further depth (can I be more detailed or more complete in my answers?) or in independence: have I primarily reproduced the material neatly as it was handed to me, or can I show that I have an independent and critical grasp of the material? Is the order of the information determined by the order in the lectures or do I reconstruct the information independently?
  - *Excellent (8,5 < 10)*
    - These answers contain more than the minimal, display an independent grasp of the material, and are well written. Differences (say, between 9 and 9,5) will be in details, but not in your approach. You don't have to change anything structurally: keep up the good work!

Answer the following two questions in approx. 250 words per question (fit them together on 1 page):

**1. Explain how both Hobbes and Rousseau could agree with (a part of) the myth of Prometheus.**

- Elements myth:
  - All mortal beings receive gifts to prevent them from going extinct. But Epimetheus forgets man, who is 'naked and shoeless, and had neither bed nor arms of defence'. Thereupon Prometheus steals 'the mechanical arts [...] and fire with them' from the gods, making man the only creature to share in a divine attributes. Prometheus is brutally punished for the offense and through Epimetheus all evils are unloaded upon humanity out of Pandora's box.
- Interpretation I:
  - Mens is naturally unfit to survive in nature and culture compensates for this handicap.
- Hobbes could agree with this:
  - For Hobbes, culture is civilization (a complex society with developed forms of politics, arts, science, technology and industry). Culture is a survival-technique: without society (in the 'state of nature') man succumbs to a war of all against all, where everyone needs all their time and energy to defend themselves and prevent attacks. This obsession with survival deprives men of the time and energy for cultural development. Civilization is the way that the creature who is unfit for the state of nature can nevertheless survive in nature.
- Interpretation II:
  - Technology and fire are stolen from the gods and *hybris* is punished: unfettered civilization is a source of evil
  - Alternatively: technology and fire lead to conflict without the later addition of shame and justice
- Rousseau could agree with this:
  - Unfettered civilization has robbed humanity of its natural freedoms. Civilization alienates man because it transforms a life of natural needs into a life of unnatural/artificial desires. Civilization is the process through which ever-growing unnatural desires are satisfied.
    - One could add: that science/art express vices, that *amour propre* is replaced by *amour de soi*.
- **Point distribution (indication):**
  - Correct element/interpretation myth Hobbes: 2 points
  - Correct explanation Hobbes: 2 points
  - Correct element/interpretation myth Rousseau: 2 points
  - Correct explanation Rousseau: 2 points
  - Other 2 points for quality of writing, style, structure, argumentation, etc.
- **Frequent mistakes:**
  - Confusing Hobbes' state of nature with technology/civilization in the myth.
  - Saying that Rousseau advocates a return to the state of nature.
  - Identifying Zeus with Hobbes' Leviathan (or another theocratic reading of Hobbes' or Rousseau's philosophy of culture).

- Stating regarding Rousseau that he would think Prometheus did something good when stealing the fire, or stating that Rousseau would simply disagree with the myth.

**2. Kant writes: “Man wishes concord; but Nature knows better what is good for the race; she wills discord.” (Kant, *Idea of a universal history on a cosmopolitan plan, fourth thesis*).**

**Explain what this means.**

Elements:

- “Man wishes concord”
  - Kant distinguishes the conduct of individuals (which is contingent and unpredictable) from the idea of a universal history, in which said conduct can be seen to contribute to a greater plan. Man wants concord: “Individual men, and even nations [...] are severally pursuing their own peculiar and often contradictory purposes” (1) and as such “He would live in ease and passive content” (4), preferably in a community (“feeling himself in the social state more than Man”, 3).
- “but Nature knows better”
  - Given that humanity does not develop according to any *human* plan, Kant asks whether ‘some natural purpose in such a senseless current of human actions’ (1) can be found. This natural purpose is not knowable but can be thought (an ‘idea’), and concerns the full development of the ‘tendencies of human nature’ (ultimately: a free political life under a global political constitution).
- “she wills discord”
  - The way nature attains its goals through people is man’s *ungesellige Geselligkeit* (unsocial sociability): man has gregarious inclinations but also continually undermines communities. This (competition, envy, desire for status and power, etc.) drive humanity to further development. Culture is the development of talents and ambitions fueled by the desire of men to give themselves a social ‘rank’.
- **Point distribution (indication):**
  - Explanation man wishes concord: 2 points
  - Explanation difference individual actions versus natural teleology: 3 points
  - Explanation unsocial sociability as discord: 3 points
  - Other 2 points for quality of writing, style, structure, argumentation, etc.
- **Frequent mistakes:**
  - That the antagonism belongs to the noumenal world
  - That Kant’s idea of *Bildung* is confessional (as opposed to saying that the notion of *Bildung* comes from a confessional tradition)

**Answer the following question in approx. 500 words (fit it on 1 page):**

- 3. The Greek *paideia* means formation, education or development. Compare Plato’s and Aristotle’s views on *paideia* by considering the following three aspects:**
- What *paideia* leads away from (what it means to be undeveloped or *apaidousia*)**
  - The nature of *paideia* (wherein development consists)**
  - The goal of *paideia* (where development leads)**

**In your answer, use at least 1 (short) quote by Plato and 1 (short) quote by Aristotle.**

- Plato:
  - What *paideia* leads away from:
    - *Apaideusia*: takes immediate appearance to be truth. Inability to distinguish being from appearance, opinion from truth.
    - This is a 'natural' because primitive state, but also a specific cultural state (primitive culture because endorsement of adherence to prevailing, contingent laws, customs or *nomos*, and chasing after individual interests, etc.)
  - Nature of *paideia*:
    - *Paideia* is hard/painful 'craft [of] turning around' of the soul.
      - Break with familiar, self-evidence
    - Not the accumulation of new truths (transfer of knowledge) but a development in one's relation to truth: from appearance to sensory original to intelligible forms to first causes
      - Two forms of being-directed: ridding of false opinion and recognizing intrinsic truth/value
  - Goal of *paideia*:
    - Ambiguity of 'being directed' towards the good:
      - directed towards the *truly good* (Plato as 'dogmatic')
        - Culture teaches difference between extrinsic and intrinsic value, between relative and absolute norms
      - but knowing that the truly good is not known *per the usual forms of knowing* (Plato as 'sceptic')
    - Ambiguity of corresponding practices:
      - Contemplation versus political rule
- Aristotle:
  - What *paideia* leads away from:
    - 'First' nature: the undeveloped or contingent natural aptitude
    - Lack of a cultivated attitude towards one's emotions
    - No wisdom or justice possible
  - Nature of *paideia*:
    - Actualization of natural capacities of the soul that pertain to human beings
    - Growth towards an optimal point of maturity (flourishing) in a process of natural development (growth -> flourishing -> decay)
    - Practically: through teaching and practice of habit-formation
  - Goal of *paideia*:
    - Realizing the proper function of man (good for man versus good itself)
      - Activity corresponding to reason: 'virtue'.
      - Being virtuous: developing character that enables one to find the reasonable middle in one's emotions habitually, i.e. as 'second nature'
    - Criterion: autarky or independence of individual and community
- Comparison:
  - Similarities:
    - Both are eudaimonists: happiness or the good life as highest, intrinsic good
    - In that sense development is for both the recognition of the difference between relative and absolute norms

- Analogy individual/community
  - For both, reason/*logos*/intellect is decisive for development
- Differences:
  - Liberation from appearances versus development of latent capacities (giving appearances their due)
  - Pluriformity of the good versus the good itself
  - Realizable good versus the transcendent good
  - For Aristotle, *logos* is important but not only: cultivation of all natural capacities / the total organism
- **Point distribution (indication):**
  - 3 aspects Plato: 3 points
  - 3 aspects Aristotle: 3 points
  - Comparison (similarities+differences): 2 points
  - Other 2 points for quality of writing, style, structure, argumentation, etc. (including the 2 quotes)
- **Frequent mistakes:**
  - Aristotle was clearly tougher, given that the 3 aspects of Plato were explicitly spelled out in the lectures.
  - Aristotle's 'capacities' were sometimes construed as individual/subjective 'talents' instead of natural human capacities. Relatedly: pluriformity of the good was sometimes interpreted subjectively (what is good for you is not what is good for me) rather than as applying to natural species (what is good for man is not what is good for a horse)
  - That free time is the end goal of Aristotelian development (a case could be made for this, but explanation is required: free time for what and why?)
  - That Plato's development would be individual and Aristotle's development social. I understand the idea that Plato teaches a move away from ruling conventions. Still, given the pain and suffering involved, the model is not one of prisoners releasing themselves from the cave: they need to be released by another. Only in dialogue are we confronted with the falsity of our previous opinions. Such dialogue belongs to the tasks of the philosopher who returns into the cave.
  - That Aristotle's goal is action but Plato's is contemplation: this is too one-sided (what about the return into the cave and contemplation as a form of activity)? Or: any other denial of the ambiguity of the final goal of culture.
  - Frequently, things are mentioned but not explained sufficiently, or a metaphor is reproduced without interpreting it, or language remains vague. Some frequent examples:
    - 'the good is the goal for Plato' (doing what with the good? What about the return into the cave?);
    - 'the process is painful' (how to interpret that metaphor?);
    - 'eventually you come to see the good' (what does 'seeing' the good mean?);
    - 'Plato says we can never grasp/achieve/reach the good' (what does grasp or achieve or reach mean here? Without explanation, this suggests a very different simile, namely one where we never get fully out of the cave)