

Argument Structure

Below are some basic outlines of a possible Plato paper, based largely on the responses given to me by many of my students in October 2004. I will begin with the most basic organization pattern and then move towards greater level of complexity. These are just *organizational* models; they are not designed to cover every possibility, or for that matter to provide an example of excellent content. Two points to remember:

- First, to a great extent your specific argument will depend a great deal on the specific content as well as the purpose of your essay.
- Second, remember that each of these structures can be easily expanded so that sections could theoretically become large subsections of a chapter, or even perhaps a chapter within a much larger work. At these longer lengths, the different styles outlined below could be nested within one another. For example, a book could be organized along the lines of example #3 (introduction, chapter 1 for background, chapters 2-6 for actual argument, Conclusion), while an individual chapter could be organized like example #4.

Example #1: Variant of Simple Five-Paragraph Essay Structure

Thesis: Had Plato a chance to see the American educational system at work, he would have seriously criticized it for its democratic character, its curriculum, and, above all, its fundamental goals.

Topic sentence 1: The first aspect of the American educational system that would have struck Plato as problematic is its democratic nature.

Topic sentence 2: Plato would have been more ambivalent about the place that women have within the system.

Topic sentence 3: After taking to task the relatively egalitarian character of the American system, Plato would have seriously criticized the curriculum of the American education system.

Topic sentence 4: At the deepest level, Plato would have had serious problems with the fundamental goals of the entire American system.

Conclusion

Example #2: Elaboration of Simple Five-Paragraph Essay Structure

Thesis: Had Plato a chance to see the American educational system at work, he would have seriously criticized it for its democratic character, its curriculum, and, above all, its fundamental goals.

Topic sentence 1: The first aspect of the American educational system that would have struck Plato as problematic is its democratic nature. The basic American system is built around the principle of providing a basic education for all.

Topic sentence 2: Plato's system as laid out in the Republic, on the other hand, assumed different kinds of education for different population group.

Topic sentence 3: Plato would have been more ambivalent about one key aspect of our democratic system, though—namely, the place of women in the system.

Topic sentence 4: After taking to task the relatively egalitarian character of the American system, Plato would have seriously criticized the curriculum of the American education system. The American system is built around providing the basis skills that one needs to survive, and hopefully thrive, within a modern democratic economy.

Topic sentence 5: Plato's system above all was focused on providing a tiny elite—the Guardians—with the skills they would need to protect the city.

Topic sentence 6: At the deepest level, Plato would have had serious problems with the fundamental goals of the entire American system.

Conclusion

Example #3: Background-Argument Structure

Thesis: Had Plato a chance to see the American educational system at work, he would have seriously criticized it for its democratic character, its curriculum, and, above all, its fundamental goals.

Topic sentence 1: The American education system is one designed to fit well with the demands of modern, capitalist society

Topic sentence 2: The first aspect of the American educational system that would have struck Plato as problematic is its democratic nature.

Topic sentence 3: Plato would have been more ambivalent about the place that women have within the system.

Topic sentence 4: After taking to task the relatively egalitarian character of the American system, Plato would have seriously criticized the curriculum of the American education system.

Topic sentence 5: At the deepest level, Plato would have had serious problems with the fundamental goals of the entire American system.

Conclusion

Example #4: Counterargument-Argument Structure

Thesis: Had Plato a chance to see the American educational system at work, he would have seriously criticized it for its democratic character, its curriculum, and, above all, its fundamental goals.

Topic sentence 1: There are certainly many aspects of our educational system that Plato would have praised.

Topic sentence 2: Still, there is no doubt that Plato also would have had many problems with our system as well. The first aspect of the American educational system that would have struck Plato as problematic is its democratic nature.

Topic sentence 3: Plato would have been more ambivalent about the place that women have within the system.

Topic sentence 4: After taking to task the relatively egalitarian character of the American system, Plato would have seriously criticized the curriculum of the American education system.

Topic sentence 5: At the deepest level, Plato would have had serious problems with the fundamental goals of the entire American system.

Conclusion

Example #5: Argument-Counterargument-Response Structure

Thesis: Had Plato a chance to see the American educational system at work, he would have seriously criticized it for its democratic character, its curriculum, and, above all, its fundamental goals.

Topic sentence 1: The first aspect of the American educational system that would have struck Plato as problematic is its democratic nature.

Topic sentence 2: After taking to task the relatively egalitarian character of the American system, Plato would have seriously criticized the curriculum of the American education system.

Topic sentence 3: Now, there is no doubt that Plato would have been less critical, and perhaps even have praised, a few aspects of our system. First of all, he would have acknowledged the real steps we had made to provide women with equal educational opportunities.

Topic sentence 4: He would have also have appreciated the importance of differently tracked classes and different kinds of higher education for shaping the education system somewhat to fit an individual's eventual place of employment.

Topic sentence 5: Yet these similarities between Plato's system and ours are shown to be merely superficial by comparing the fundamental goals of the two systems.

Conclusion

Example #6: Combination of #3 (Background-Argument) and #4 (Counterargument-Argument) Structures

[This was included to just illustrate that there are limitless possibilities.]

Thesis: Had Plato a chance to see the American educational system at work, he would have seriously criticized it for its democratic character, its curriculum, and, above all, its fundamental goals.

Topic sentence 1: The American education system is one designed to fit well with the demands of modern, capitalist society

Topic sentence 2: There are certainly many aspects of our educational system that Plato would have praised.

Topic sentence 3: Still, there is no doubt that Plato also would have had many problems with our system as well. The first aspect of the American educational system that would have struck Plato as problematic is its democratic nature.

Topic sentence 4: Plato would have been more ambivalent about the place that women have within the system.

Topic sentence 5: After taking to task the relatively egalitarian character of the American system, Plato would have seriously criticized the curriculum of the American education system.

Topic sentence 6: At the deepest level, Plato would have had serious problems with the fundamental goals of the entire American system.

Conclusion