Philosophies of Love and Death, Minor Essay Assessment.

Write an essay of approximately 1500 words either on one of the topics suggested below, or on a topic of your creation (if you decide to pursue the latter, please run it by the Unit Coordinator before starting). You are also welcome to combine topics, or to treat them as prompts for your own ideas, rather than set questions with definitive answers.

Your essay should have a clear introduction and thesis statement, and it should develop a consistent argument in favour of the thesis, providing sufficient evidence (that is, direct quotations and specific passages) from the text or texts in question to defend its main claims. It is also important that you take the time to proofread your essay closely for grammar and expression before you submit.

You are NOT required to use any external sources for this essay, but you are welcome to if you would like. If you do wish to use external sources, it is recommended that you run them by the Unit Coordinator as well, as all of the texts we are studying this term have generated mountains of secondary research, and sifting through what is and is not valuable can be a difficult task.

Also, if you choose to use external sources, be sure the reference the properly. You are welcome to use any referencing system with which you are familiar (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc.), so long as you use it correctly and consistently throughout. If you are only using the readings assigned for this unit, an author or title plus a page number are sufficient.

1. What does Byung-Chul Han mean by ‘being-able-not-to-be-able’? How does he relate this concept to his understanding of love in contemporary society? How does it relate to his larger criticism of society in *The Agony of Eros*?
2. Plato’s *Symposium* introduces a series of different views of love, encapsulated in the speeches of six different characters. Analyse and compare at least two of these speeches, and the conceptions of love they develop.
3. In Plato’s *Symposium*, why do you think is Diotima a woman? Is this fact relevant to the theory of love developed in Socrates’s speech? Does Socrates even make a speech, or is it entirely a quotation from a character who is absent from the Symposium itself?
4. How would you characterise the so-called ‘doctrine of recollection’ as it appears in Plato’s *Phaedo*? Is it a coherent theory of knowledge? Does it prove anything interesting about education, or about the nature of the soul?
5. What do you make of Socrates’s proposal that philosophy involves preparation for death? Why do you think Socrates suggests such a thing? What kinds of evidence does he provide in favour of this strange claim?
6. What does Freud mean by the ‘compulsion to repeat’? How is it related to his theory of the pleasure principle, and to his effort to point ‘beyond’ that theory? How is it related to his observation of the child’s game of ‘fort-da’?
7. What cultural products exemplify what Freud says about the ‘death drive’? Is it a concept that applies primarily to individual psychology, or could it also be used to analyse social and political phenomena? If so, can you offer examples?
8. Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* offers an anthropological account of the origins of law and prohibition. Explain and analyse Freud’s basic claims in this regard. Is his account valid? What aspects of human society does it elucidate? What aspect does it leave in the dark?
9. *Civilisation and Its Discontents* is one of Freud’s most pessimistic works. He seems to suggest that aggression and violence are irreducible aspects of all human community. What do you make of this claim? Is Freud’s argument valid, or does it overlook as much as it reveals?