

24.01 Classics of Western Philosophy Spring 2006

FIRST ESSAY TOPICS

Due Date: Two days after Lec #12

Please write an 8-page paper on one of the topics below. Note that this is the piece of work you will be revising and resubmitting. When you resubmit it, remember to attach your first version of the paper to your resubmitted version. Deadlines for resubmissions will be set by your Section leader.

1. Plato, *Phaedo*.

'Answer then, and tell me what it is, by whose presence in a body, that body will be living.'
'Soul.'
'And is this always so?'
'Of course.'
'Then soul, whatever it occupies, always comes to that thing bringing life?'
'It comes indeed.'
'And is there an opposite to life or is there none?'
'There is.'
'What is it?'
'Death.'
'Now soul will absolutely never admit the opposite of what it brings up, as has been agreed earlier?'
'Most emphatically', said Cebes.
'Well now, what name did we give just now to what doesn't admit the form of the even?'
'Un-even.'
'And to that which doesn't admit the just, and to whatever doesn't admit the musical?'
'Un-musical and un-just.'
'Well then, what do we call whatever doesn't admit death?'
'Im-mortal.'
'But soul doesn't admit death?'
'No.'
'Then soul is immortal'
'It's immortal.' (Plato, *Phaedo*, 105:10-106)

Explain and evaluate the 'Final Argument' for the immortality of the soul, in Plato's *Phaedo*. In what ways, if any, does it rely on Plato's theory of Forms?

2. Aristotle, *On the Soul*.

Suppose that the eye were an animal—sight would have been its soul, for sight is the substance of the eye which corresponds to the account, the eye being merely the matter of seeing; when seeing is removed the eye is no longer an eye, except in name—no more than the eye of a statue or of a painted figure. (Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 412b:15)

Explain the implications of this analogy for Aristotle's account of the soul. In what ways, if any, does Aristotle's account of soul differ from Plato's?

3. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*.

...to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the function of man. For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any artist, and in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the 'well' is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function. (1097b: 23)

Explain and evaluate the 'Function Argument' in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.
What question does it aim to answer? How persuasive do you find it?

4. Descartes, *First Meditation*.

How often, asleep at night, am I convinced of just such familiar events—that I am here in my dressing-gown, sitting by the fire—when in fact I am lying undressed in bed! ... I see plainly that there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep. (Descartes, *Meditation I*)

What conclusion is Descartes trying to establish in the argument from dreaming?
Explain the argument in your own words. How successful do you think it is?