

TOPICS FOR THE FIRST PAPER

Write a short essay of 3-4 pages (900-1200) words) on *one* of the following topics.

Papers are due on Session 13.

In writing your papers, please attend to the paper guidelines for the class.

1. In the *Meno*, Socrates develops his doctrine of recollection at least in part as a response to the paradox of inquiry. What is the paradox of inquiry? What is the doctrine of recollection? Does the doctrine of recollection solve the problem posed by the paradox of inquiry? Can you offer a better solution?

2. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates presents a series of arguments for the immortality of the soul. Discuss and evaluate one or more of these arguments, indicating the strengths and weaknesses. Are the arguments convincing? If not, where do they fail? If so, how would you defend them against objections, e.g., ones that Socrates' interlocutors raised?

3. Aristotle clearly believes that one cannot be taught virtue, or excellence, simply through a course of philosophical study. For example, he says,

It is well said, then, that it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good. But most people do not do these, but take refuge in theory and think they are being philosophers and will become good in this way...[but they] will not be made well in soul by such a course of philosophy. (1105b8-18)

Explicate Aristotle's definition of excellence (see 1106b36-1107a2) and explain why he thinks that one cannot learn to be virtuous simply through philosophical inquiry. On his view, how do we become excellent and virtuous? If philosophical study is not a method for becoming virtuous, what is the point of the *Nicomachean Ethic*? Indicate the strengths and weaknesses of Aristotle's position. (Note that it may be helpful to consider Aristotle's position by comparing it with Socrates' view that philosophy is morally therapeutic.)

4. Like Socrates and Plato before him, Aristotle believes that the happy life is the life of virtue. Aristotle maintains that happiness, i.e., human good, "turns out to be activity of the soul in conformity with excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete". (NE I:7 1098a16-18) What does Aristotle mean by this, and what reasons does he offer for this conclusion? Do you find his reasons convincing? Is the happy life the life of virtue?

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