

## SECOND ANCIENT PAPER PROMPT

DEADLINE: OCTOBER 5

You have three topic choices for this first paper.

- (1) “The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.” (Plato, *Apology*, 38a)
- (2) “Not only do the objects of knowledge owe their being known to the good, but their existence and being are also due to it.” (Plato, *Republic*, 509b)
- (3) “We must at some previous time have learned what we now recollect. This is possible only if our soul existed somewhere before.” (Plato, *Phaedo*, 73a)

In the paper, please give an interpretation of one of these passages. In this interpretation, you should

- Clearly formulate the thesis of the author, and if there is any unusual or technical terms, explain those;
- Show what argument the author gives for the thesis. Read the larger passage around the thesis carefully again, and see if you can reconstruct the argument premise by premise. If you think some premises are missing, you can supply those — be a charitable reader.
- Pay special attention to the examples the author uses. Do these examples support the thesis? Can you provide other examples that do?
- Evaluate the argument. If you think that the argument is unsound, explain why.
- Evaluate the thesis. If you think the author’s argument for the thesis is sound, make the thesis plausible by your own reasons. If you think that the author’s argument is unsound, either explain why you nevertheless think that the thesis is true, or explain why it is false.

A few general notes about writing philosophy:

- The most important virtue of philosophical writing is clarity and succinctness. If you can say something in 3 simple words, then it is pointless to say it in 10 complicated ones.
- Always have an introduction in which you give some context for the paper and most importantly, state your thesis. (Your thesis in a history of philosophy paper will be most probably something about a specific interpretation of a passage, or perhaps an evaluation of it.)
- Do not forget to give the *precise* reference for everything you quote. As a reminder, we refer to Plato by the so-called Stephanus numbers (e.g., 382a). If it is a direct, verbatim quotation, in addition to this you might also give the page numbers in the book where you got it from — this will be page number in the specific edition of the Anthology you are using. If so, you need to give the citation details in the Bibliography (editor, title, publisher, year).
- I do not mind which citation style you use, but do try to be consistent. (In philosophy, we tend to use Chicago, but again, it’s up to you. But please, please, do not cite a text by indicating only its author. The aim of giving a proper citation is to make it easy for your

reader to find the passage. I will not find the passage easily if you just say it is by, e.g., Plato.)

- You do not need to use any additional resources for this paper. If you would nevertheless like to read something on these topics, you can also use your “usual” resources to find things (except Wikipedia).

**Please bring your paper in hard copy to class on the day of the due date, OR send it to me by e-mail before class.** Late assignments will not be considered.

**Do NOT write your name on your paper.** Submit it with a number generated by your birthday (MMDDYY) and the last two digits of the zip code where you grew up (e.g., if you were born on May 15, 1990, and lived in 10470, you should write 05159070 on your paper).