Paper #1

Format:

The paper should be:

- typewritten,
- have standard margins (1” top and bottom, 1”-1.5” left and right),
- be printed in 12 point type,
- be double spaced,
- and be at least 2 pages long.

If you wish to print your paper single-sided on scrap paper (i.e., paper that already has something printed on one side), that is permissible. Furthermore, you do not need to include a cover page – the title and author can appear at the top of the first page.

Organization:

Typically philosophy papers, even the most complex articles such as those found in current philosophy journals, have a relatively standard form. First, there is a brief introductory paragraph that states the problem, and (usually) the author’s thesis (the position she intends to take on the problem). This is followed with paragraphs that serve to summarize the relevant views that need to be discussed in order to adequately inform the reader what exactly the issue is. Finally, the arguments, disagreements, or views summarized in those expository paragraphs are assessed.

For more information and suggestions, chapter 4 of Hugo Bedau’s *Thinking and Writing About Philosophy*, 2nd edition, has been scanned and put on the course website. That chapter contains several example essays, as well as a set of strategies for writing an essay on a philosophical topic, some of which may be applicable in the current context.

Content:

The paper should address one of the following topics. In your essay, be certain to address all parts of the chosen topic.

1. The *Euthyphro* contains one of the most famous questions ever asked in all of philosophy: “Do the gods love piety because it is pious, or is it pious because they love it?” (10a). Explain (a) what task Euthyphro and Socrates are engaged in, and (b) what Euthyphro proposes that prompts this response from Socrates. In addition, indicate briefly the import of the question for Euthyphro’s proposal –
how does it pose a problem for Euthyphro’s suggestion? Finally, how does Socrates’ question pose a dilemma for someone who attempts to justify an action by appealing to the will of some deity or deities? Is there a way out of this dilemma?

2. Late in the *Euthyphro* (from approximately 12d to 15d), Socrates and Euthyphro pursue a different strategy for assessing the nature of piety: They look for a category of which piety is a part, and then see if they can identify something unique about that part. First, what category do they agree that piety is a part of? Second, Euthyphro offers three possible answers regarding what is unique about piety. For each of these proposals, state Euthyphro’s suggestion, and summarize Socrates’ argument against it. When summarizing Socrates’ arguments, be sure to clearly state the relevant reasons for why the arguments fail.

(Note: We did not explicitly discuss this topic in class, so choose at your own risk! However, the process of dissecting the discussion can be rewarding.)

3. In the *Apology*, Socrates engages his accuser Meletus and three times attempts to demonstrate how Meletus’ own beliefs lead to absurd conclusions. Carefully describe two of these three attempts. Finally, identify at least one premise that Meletus might reasonably revise in order to avoid one of Socrates’ criticisms.

4. In the *Crito*, Socrates argues that he must remain in Athens and accept the death sentence of the jury. Summarize his argument for why he must stay. Does his position in the *Crito* conflict with his actions as described in the *Apology*, and if so, in what way?

5. In the *Phaedo*, Plato argues for a certain account of what it is to learn. What is it to learn, according to Plato? In support of this view, Plato (through the character of Socrates) appeals to an example involving “equal pieces of wood”. Describe this example, and illustrate how it serves as an argument for his account of learning. Finally, is there an alternative account available? If so, describe it and how it differs from Socrates’ account.

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1 Note: I am not here asking for the rather complicated paraphrase of the exact argument as it was given during lecture. Rather, try to indicate more generally how Socrates’ question poses a problem for Euthyphro’s proposal.

2 Here’s a hint: The second proposal is at or near 13d; so Euthyphro’s first suggestion is before that point, and his third is after it.