

24.01 Classics of Western Philosophy

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FIRST SHORT EXERCISE

Due Date: Four days after Lec #4, in your Section.

‘Well now, with regard to the instances in the logs, and in general, the equals we mentioned just now, are we affected in some way as this: do they seem to us to be equal in the same way as *what it is* itself? Do they fall short of it at all in being like the equal, or not?’

‘Very far short of it.’

‘Then whenever anyone, on seeing a thing, thinks to himself, “this thing that I now see seeks to be like another of the things that are, but falls short, and cannot be like that object: it is inferior”, do we agree that the man who thinks this must previously have known the object he says it resembles but falls short of?’

‘He must.’

‘Now then, have we ourselves been affected in just this way, or not, with regard to the equals, and the equal itself?’

‘Indeed we have.’

‘Then we must previously have known the equal, before that time when we first, on seeing the equals, thought that all of them were striving to be like the equal but fell short of it.’

Plato, *Phaedo* (74d-75a)

Write **2 pages** analysing this argument. Feel free to use a different wording in your version than that given by Plato. See if you can find a way to put the argument in the form of numbered premises, and conclusion(s). After stating the argument, briefly explain it in your own words. Comment on its significance: what is the point of arguing for this conclusion? Comment on its cogency: which premises are true or plausible, which are false or implausible? Is the inference, as you’ve described it, a valid one?

In this kind of task, you won’t need to use every sentence in the passage in reconstructing the argument. Occasionally you need to supply a premise, or a conclusion, that is not explicitly stated. Occasionally you need to briefly draw on what was said in a previous passage. Sometimes there can be more than one defensible interpretation. You will find it useful to consult the resources at the Web site.