

Due date: Tuesday, May 11 by 5pm. You may submit via email (hhalvors@), or to the PHI 325 inbox between 1879 and Marx Halls.

Objective: The goal of this paper is to state and defend a philosophically interesting claim vis-a-vis religion. It would be natural — and thus suggested — to write something related to what we have been reading. But that is not a requirement. If in doubt about the appropriateness of your topic, please consult the professor.

You can either make an interpretive claim — e.g. how to understand something Kant says — or, you can state and defend your own thesis. (Of course, these two objectives are not mutually exclusive.) I include a list of suggested topics at the end of this document. You can choose a topic from this list, or you can create a topic yourself.

For some suggestions on how to write a philosophy paper, in general, you might wish to look at www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html

Length: Approximately 10–12 pages, either 1.5 or double spaced. There is leeway here as concerns length; the length should be tailored to the content. I believe that a high idea-to-page ratio is objectively valuable, and I grade accordingly. So, if you can say something interesting and defend it adequately in the course of ten pages, then you get higher marks than if you say essentially the same thing in fifteen pages.

Formatting requirements: You should employ a consistent system of citations, e.g. one of the standard systems described in the Chicago Manual of Style. I'm permissive in this respect, so long as your paper is readable and gives appropriate credit to other authors.

Some topic ideas: You may optionally use any of the following topics as a starting point for your paper.

- Kant claims that no theistic argument succeeds if the ontological argument fails. Explain and assess his argument.
- Give the most charitable possible explication of Kant's claim that theistic belief is required by morality, and then either defend or rebut Kant's claim. Whether you end up taking a positive view of Kant's claim or not, you should consider one or more possible objections to Kant's position.
- In *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Philo argues that empirical data does not provide persuasive evidence for the existence of the traditional God of western monotheism. Roughly speaking, he says that there are too many competing hypotheses that are also consistent with the data. But the same is true in many cases in science (e.g.

physics), and in those cases we aren't usually driven to skepticism. (In the philosophy of science, this issue is usually called "underdetermination of theory by data.") Is there a difference here between religion and science? Are there factors beyond "fit with data" (e.g. simplicity) that might permit rational choice of one theory/religion over another?

- In "Of miracles," Hume announces a "general maxim"

That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior.

Try to help Hume by translating his maxim into probability theory. (You would be helped here by Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure*, page 38.) Does Hume have a point that counts against the rationality of believing that miracles have occurred?

- Plantinga claims that theistic belief (e.g. $G = \text{God exists}$) can be *properly basic*. But if G can be properly basic, then couldn't almost any belief be counted as properly basic? Is there any relevant difference between belief in God and belief in the great pumpkin?
- Kitcher claims that religious disagreement (or pluralism) undermines the rationality of religious belief. Reconstruct his argument, supplying missing premises where necessary. Then evaluate the argument.
- Kitcher claims that supernatural religion is almost certainly false. What does he mean by "supernatural," and what is supposed to be so bad about it?
- Kitcher sketches a case against the view that the Christian Bible is literally true. (His case plausibly also applies to other scriptures, e.g. the Koran.) He does not supply many details, but rather cites numerous authorities (e.g. the diligent scholars in 19th century Germany); so, to evaluate the case in detail, one would need to undertake some serious research. But regardless of the details, Kitcher's critique is based on non-trivial methodological presuppositions. Uncover and critique these presuppositions. (You might want to consider Stephen Evans' article on this topic.)
- Kitcher claims that "providentialist religion" is falsified by Darwin's theory of evolution. Provide a charitable reconstruction of the argument, and then evaluate it. (You might also want to consider Paul Draper's article on this topic.)
- Kitcher claims that it is wrong for a person to allow his religious beliefs to guide his behavior. To support this claim, he provides examples, e.g. of terrorist bombings. Help Kitcher make his case. Or refute Kitcher.