

**PHILOSOPHY 1600 HONORS - PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION**  
**ESSAY INSTRUCTIONS**

1. The due dates for your two essays have been revised from those given in the syllabus, and are listed below.
2. Before handing in your first essay, you are to hand in an outline of it, so that I can look over your basic plan, and make suggestions for possible changes. Instructions for writing this outline are set out below. (No grade will be assigned to the outline.)
3. No outline is required in the case of your second essay.
4. Before starting to work on the outline of your essay, be sure to read the handout, "Writing a Philosophy Essay," and then discuss with me any things that you are uncertain about.
5. The main points to keep in mind are summarized on the "Essay Checklist and Cover Sheet". This is to be attached to the front of your essay, and before doing the final draft of your essay, you should go through your essay carefully to see whether your essay is satisfactory in the relevant respects.
6. Each essay should be **approximately 4 to 5 double-spaced**, typewritten pages in length (about 1000-1500 words).

**DUE DATES**

<b>Outline of Essay 1:</b>	<b>Friday, October 15</b>
<b>Essay 1:</b>	<b>Monday, October 27 (30%)</b>
<b>Essay 2:</b>	<b>Monday, November 24 (30%)</b>

**Instructions for Writing the Outline of Your First Essay**

The short outline of your essay should be only about one double-spaced, typewritten page in length, and it should consist of the following sections:

**Section 1: Your Basic Thesis**

In this first section, you should state the basic thesis that you will be defending. This should require only a sentence or two.

**Section 2: The Structure of Your Essay**

In this section, you should describe, in a single, short paragraph, how your essay will be divided up into sections.

**Section 3: Your Main Supporting Argument or Arguments**

In this section, you should indicate how you intend to argue in support of your thesis. Here you need to indicate what sort of argument (or arguments) you will be offering. A detailed description is not necessary: what you want to do here is to give a clear description that is sufficiently detailed so that I can see the general thrust of your argument, and thus be in a position to determine whether it seems like a generally promising line of argument, or whether there are possible difficulties that need to be taken into account.

#### Section 4: Important Objections to Your Arguments or to Your Thesis

A crucial part of any philosophical essay involves considering objections, either to the argument (or arguments) that you have offered in support of your basic thesis, or to the thesis itself, or to both. The quality of an essay depends in large measure upon whether one has addressed the strongest and most important objections to one's own arguments and views, and whether one has dealt with those objections in a convincing fashion. In this final section, then, you should briefly state the main objection (or objections) that you plan to consider, and how you will respond. Here, too, your goal should be merely to enable me to appreciate the general thrust of the objection (or objections) that you will be considering, and of your response (or responses), so that I can determine whether there are any problems that you need to think about further.

#### ESSAY TOPICS

In your essays, you may deal with a fairly broad topic, or you may, instead, focus upon a narrower issue, or upon a discussion by a single author. Some possibilities of each sort are listed below. These are, however, merely some suggestions, and you can tackle any topic that is covered by the readings that we are doing for this course. But if you would like to write on a different topic than those listed below, it would be best to check with me first, so that I can alert you to any possible problems, and suggest important readings.

The topic of your second essay should be significantly different from the one that you choose for your first essay.

1. Briefly state the main thesis advanced by William James in his essay "The Will to Belief" and then critically evaluate the line of argument that he offers in support of it.
2. David Hume maintained that the wise man proportions his belief to the evidence. What exactly does this mean? How does William James's view differ from that of Hume's? What is the correct view, and why?
3. Carefully set out, and then evaluate, any one of St. Thomas Aquinas's arguments in support of the existence of God.
4. Can there be infinite causal regresses?
5. Set out in a step by step fashion, and then evaluate, Samuel Clarke's argument from contingency.
6. Is Richard Taylor's defense of the cosmological argument sound?
7. Carefully set out and then discuss, a version of the teleological argument that focuses upon the presence in the world of complex ordered structures - such as, for example, that set out by William Paley.
8. Critically evaluate Richard Swinburne's recent formulation of the argument from design.
9. What is the most plausible view concerning the relevance of theistic proofs to religion?

10. Evaluate the views of Michael Scriven as set out in his essay "The Presumption of Atheism."
11. What are the main claims advanced by David Hume in the selection "Against Miracles"? How does he support those claims? How successful is he?
12. Can one successfully appeal to miraculous events as reasons for accepting some particular religion?
13. There are a number of different types of religious experiences - such as visions, various emotional experiences, mystical experiences, and so on - that have been held by different people to provide one with good reason for believing in the existence of God. Focus upon one particular type of religious experience, and discuss carefully what can be said for and against the claim that experiences of that type provide good reason for believing in the existence of God.
14. Do mystical experiences provide one with objective knowledge of reality?
15. What can be said for and against the claim that a satisfactory naturalistic explanation can be given of religious experiences? What view would you defend, and why?
16. Discuss Louis Pojman's critique of Gary Gutting's version of the argument from Religious Experience? Does Pojman show that Gutting's argument is unsound?
17. What is the most promising theistic response to the argument from the hiddenness of God? Discuss carefully whether that reply succeeds in rebutting the argument.
18. How successful is the argument from evil as an argument for atheism? If you think that it is successful, carefully discuss the most important replies to the argument, and indicate why you think they fail. If, on the other hand, you think that the argument is unsuccessful, carefully set out what you take to be the crucial response to the argument, and defend it against possible objections.
19. Briefly set out, and then carefully evaluate, John Hick's soul-making theodicy.
20. Can it be plausibly maintained that all the evil in the world is logically necessary, either to avoid some greater evil, or for some greater good that outweighs the evil in question?
21. Carefully evaluate the free will defense.
22. It is sometimes said that the argument from evil, regardless of what force it may or may not have with respect to a deity of unlimited power, knowledge, and goodness, has no bearing at all upon belief in a finite deity. Carefully discuss this issue.<sup>23</sup> Are there good reasons for thinking that a human being has an immaterial soul that survives the destruction of his or her body, and that is the bearer of personal identity?
24. Bertrand Russell argues that it is likely that death is the final end of a person's existence. What reasons does Russell offer for this view? Is he right or not, and why?
25. If human beings do not have immaterial souls, is it possible for a human being to be restored to life via resurrection?
26. Briefly explain what is meant by a divine command theory of morality, and then carefully discuss what can be said for and against such a theory. What view would you defend on the question of whether such a theory is tenable, and why?

27. Briefly outline, and then evaluate, the central thesis that is advanced by George Mavrodes in his essay "Religion and the Queerness of Morality."
28. Does the existence of objective moral values presuppose the existence of a divine creator?
29. Briefly set out, and then critically evaluate, the main contentions advanced by Patrick Nowell-Smith in his essay "Morality: Religious and Secular."
30. Is the doctrine of hell a good reason for rejecting Christianity?
31. Critically evaluate either St. Thomas Aquinas's defence of the doctrine of hell in his Summa Theologica, III, question 99, or St. Augustine's defence in his City of God, book 21.
32. Briefly set out, and then carefully discuss, the main criticisms of the character and outlook of Jesus advanced by Walter Kaufmann, as set out either in his Faith of a Heretic, or his Critique of Religion and Philosophy, or his Religions in Four Dimensions.