

Name: _____

Philosophy 1100: Introduction to Ethics

Exercise 1: Is Everything in the Bible True?

Due Date: Thursday, September 2

Proportion of Final Grade: 5%

In recent years, especially in the United States, but also in other countries such as Australia, the question of evolution versus creation has once again become a much-discussed issue. One of the main things at stake in that debate is, of course, the fundamentalist conception of the Bible. For, on the one hand, fundamentalists maintain that the Bible, interpreted in a straightforward and natural way, is free of all error, while, on the other hand, the account of the origin of living things advanced in *Genesis* is incompatible with the theory of evolution. So the fundamentalist belief in the absolute correctness of the Bible, and its freedom from all error, can only be sustained if the theory of evolution is false.

There is, however, a very common misconception that needs to be avoided. Most people seem to believe that, until Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species* in 1859, the fundamentalist view of the Bible was the natural and reasonable one to take. In fact, however, many people within Christianity, long before Darwin, thought that there were serious objections to the view that the Bible, interpreted in a natural and straightforward fashion, was free of all error. Thus one can find, for example, in chapter 27 of book 15 of St. Augustine's *The City of God*, a discussion of some doubts that others had raised concerning the literal truth of the story of Noah. Augustine himself held that those objections could be answered, but there were other eminent Christian thinkers who took a different view. Among the latter was Origen, who argued very vigorously, in his *De Principiis* (IV 3.1) and (I 17), for the view that there are a number of passages in the Bible that it is absurd to treat as literally true.

Many people find it somewhat difficult, initially, to approach religious writings in a critical fashion. The present assignment, however, should provide you with the opportunity of gaining some practice in doing this.

The assignment involves reading a small part of the Bible - namely ***Genesis* chapters 1 through 8** - with an eye to determining whether, **aside from the obvious issues of evolution versus creation, and of whether God really does exist**, there is other material that seems relevant to an evaluation of the fundamentalist view that the Bible, interpreted in the natural way, is totally free of error. In particular, some people have claimed that the passages in question not only contain a number of **very implausible beliefs**, but some outright **contradictions**.

Finally, there are, of course, ways of approaching the Bible that are very different from fundamentalism, and many religious thinkers - both Christians and Jews - think it is important to reject a fundamentalist view. (See, for example, *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*, by the Episcopalian bishop, John Shelby Spong.) Fundamentalists, on the other hand, feel that if the Bible does contain factual and/or moral errors, then that undermines the claim that it can reasonably be viewed as a revelation from God. The present exercise, and the next, will provide you with an opportunity to think about these issues.

Part 1: Implausible Beliefs in *Genesis*, Chapters 1 to 8

1. Before reading *Genesis*, Chapters 1 to 8, read all of the questions listed below in Part 1, so that you will know what questions you are to answer, and will have those questions in mind as you do the reading.

2. If you do not have a good translation of the Bible, scholarly versions of it are available in Norlin library. Alternatively, you can read the Bible online. The Revised Standard Version of the Bible is currently available at the following address:

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/r/rsv/browse.html>

The King James Version of the Bible is available online at

<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/k/kjv/browse.html>

Either version should be fine, although I think that the Revised Standard Version is the better translation.

3. For the first 19 of the following 20 questions, find a passage that contains an answer. In each case, state the location of the passage, and then describe, **very briefly**, what the passage says.

4. Each correct answer is worth one point, except for question 20, where there is also a bonus point.

5. Note that the order of the questions corresponds to the order in which you will find the answers in the part of *Genesis* that you're reading.

Part 1 - Questions

1. What was the temporal relation between the creation of the sun and the creation of day and night?

Passage: _____

2. Were there initially any carnivorous animals?

Passage: _____

3. How many birds and beasts did Adam give names to?

Passage: _____

4. How was the first woman created?

Passage: _____

5. Is it possible to hide from God?

Passage: _____

6. Does God have a body?

Passage: _____

7. Why is childbirth painful?

Passage: _____

8. What relation between husbands and wives did God ordain?

Passage: _____

9. Was there any tree bearing fruit that would increase one's life expectancy?

Passage: _____

10. Did people live any longer in those days?

Passage: _____

11. Were there any divine beings other than God in those days?

Passage: _____

12. How did the Nephilim (or "giants") come into being?

Passage: _____

13. Did God ever regret his decision to create human beings?

Passage: _____

14. What was God's view of people living at the time of Noah?

Passage: _____

15. What did God resolve to do as a result?

Passage: _____

16. What was the first major task that God set for Noah and his family?

Passage: _____

17. What was a second major task that God set for Noah and his family?

Passage: _____

18. Did they succeed in that task?

Passage: _____

19. How deep was the water in the resulting flood?

Passage: _____

In the case of this final question in Part 1, there is no passage that **contains an answer to the question**, but there is a passage that is **relevant**. You will receive one point for correctly identifying that passage, and then a **bonus point** if you can offer an interesting answer to the question.

20. Where did animals have to travel after the flood was over, and after they had come out of the ark?

Passage: _____

Part 2: Contradictions in *Genesis*?

The second part of this first exercise is concerned with the question of whether there are any contradictions present in the chapters that you've read.

Just as a single statement may express an implausible belief, so a single statement may contain a contradiction. But contradictions of the latter sort are rather rare, outside of logic textbooks. What you're really looking for, then, are **pairs** of passages where what is said in one passage appears to contradict what is said in the other passage.

Finding such inconsistent pairs of passages does require very careful reading, and most people will probably find this part of the exercise more difficult than Part I.

2A. The most familiar Biblical account of creation is found in *Genesis*, chapter 1, verse 1, through chapter 2, verse 3. But verses 4 through 25 of chapter 2 of *Genesis* also seems to contain an account of creation, and many people have held that these two accounts are not entirely consistent with one another. To see if this contention can be supported, try to find two claims that are advanced in the first account, and that are inconsistent with the second account. State those claims, and indicate the location of the relevant passages. (One point for each claim, and one point for each pair of relevant passages, for a possible total of four points.)

One claim which is advanced in the first account, but which is rejected in the second is

1. _____

The above claim is advanced at the following place in *Genesis*:

_____ through _____.

The above claim is inconsistent with what is said at the following place in *Genesis*:

_____ through _____.

A second claim which is advanced in the first account, but which is rejected in the second is

2. _____

The above claim is advanced at the following place in *Genesis*:

_____ through _____.

The above claim is inconsistent with what is said at the following place in *Genesis*:

_____ through _____.

2B. Confining yourself to a consideration of the story of Noah and the flood, as set out in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 of *Genesis*, list two passages dealing with God's instructions to Noah that are inconsistent with each other, giving the location of each passage, together with a brief indication of how they are inconsistent. (Correct identification of the two passages is worth one point, and a correct specification of at least one way in which they are inconsistent with each other is worth one point, for a total of two points.)

The location of the relevant inconsistent passages dealing with God's instructions to Noah are

1. _____
2. _____

One way in which these two passages are inconsistent is as follows:
