

FIRST PAPER TOPICS

Papers are due on October 2 and should consist of five double-spaced pages with one-inch margins. This should give you something about 8,500 characters in substance—i.e., not counting titles, page numbers, large-sized type and huge margins.. On the title page of your papers (which does not count as a page in your submission and which should NOT be numbered) I want you to include a character-count of the document (less the title page) which any reasonable word-processing program will provide. Each page of the document itself must be numbered. I will NOT accept unnumbered pages.

The following questions and topics are meant to be suggestive. If you wish to modify them or invent a topic of your own, you may do so. Indeed, I rather hope that you *will* do so; the point of the suggestions is to get you thinking; they are not to be followed as if they provided an algorithm for a successful paper. In any case, the object of the discussion should be one (or more) of the texts read and discussed so far this term and should deal with issues centrally relevant to both the text and to the subject-matter of our discussions in class. (If you choose to write about the Bible, for example, we are not interested in discussions of its authority.) Offer a view, supported by argument. Do not sermonize about the topics that you discuss.

Please remember that you are writing an essay, not a book-report. We have all (presumably) read the book under discussion and do not require a rehearsal of its contents. (A book-report fills up pages, but they are all empty calories, intellectually.) What an essay does supply is some reminder of the contents in the context of an argument about those contents—a reminder offered in the course of explaining how one should understand or interpret them.

Any good, short, coherent essay will be arguing something. It will help you to write the essay if you can announce (to yourself or to the reader) the overall point that you are trying to make. Such a point should not be self-evident; you should be able to state an opposing point (the one that you are denying) which is not so obvious or so silly that no one would be able to argue for it, even as you are taking five pages to argue against it.

SUGGESTIONS:

Give a careful account of Aristotle's four causes and explain the relationship among them, so that Aristotle sounds as if he had a plausible view of what is natural. What does Aristotle mean by "cause" (*aitia*, plural *aitiai*)?

Whatever they are, they have to do with change and are inherent in the nature of things. Do we believe that particular kinds of change are sometimes inherent properties of things? Or is change induced by externalities? Or both?

Aristotle quarrels with four viewpoints in the course of his exposition. He quarrels with Antiphon's view of the nature of a bed, he quarrels with Empedocles explanation of why we have teeth, he quarrels with those who think that the cosmos came about by chance, and he quarrels with those who believe that material causes offer a sufficient reason why things are as they are. What is at issue in any one or more of these quarrels and how does it the quarrel help to illuminate Aristotle's general view?

Inherent principles of change each make for change in a particular way. This way is called its *telos*, its end, its aim, its goal. Things in the world all possess a *telos*, and the purposeful activities of human beings constitute only one sort of teleological activity. Do we still employ teleological descriptions of the nature and activity of things? If things are properly described teleologically, does it follow that they have purposes?

The translation often used for expressing the idea that something happening in a *telic* way is "for the sake of". In most usage this phrase generally imputes consciousness, deliberation—a prelude to actions that are *deliberate*—and it may seem odd, at first blush, to use it of non-human changes. But is it? Trees do not put out branches *deliberately*; of course, but we are willing to say that they branch *in order to* grow more leaves *for the sake of* providing themselves with more surface for sunlight. What sort of question does this kind of expression answer and how Aristotelian are we when we employ it?

What view of the nature of things is expressed in the first chapter of Genesis? How does it compare with Aristotle's view?

Discuss the idea of "innocence" in two of the following: the second chapter of Genesis, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Candide*.

One cannot say that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a satire, but something is the point of the jokes—the arbitrary ways in which the creatures behave, the way they talk down to Alice, the way they expect her to understand what cannot be comprehended by the reader, their curious use of language, which the child is always trying to fathom. How would you describe Alice's character and her relation to the dream-creatures? What (to take an instance) is the point made by the Caucus-race, where every contestant starts and stops where and when they like, and everyone must have a victory-prize? Or is it just plain absurdity, without, as Alice says at one point about something said by one of the creatures., "an atom of meaning in it."□

The Caucus-race and, in fact, growth in general in the book is very un-Aristotelian—growth usually has an external cause, it starts when she likes and leaves off when she likes, or if it doesn't, then she learns how to control it (or, in the case of the Rabbit's fan) to avoid it.. Only at the end, when the dream is breaking up, does she start to grow in the Aristotelian way, and then the Dormouse (from the Latin root *dor-*, having to do with sleep) tells her that she has “no right to grow here”, as if growth was the result of an external force that we might learn to control. Comment in any way relevant to your sense of the book as a whole.

"How the creatures love to argue!" thinks Alice of the inhabitants of Wonderland. Compare the argumentative tendencies of any two characters from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Candide*.

A “theodicy” (from the Greek words *theos* and *dike*, god and justice, respectively) is, among other things, an argument confronting the view that evil exists with the view that the universe was created by an omnipotent, benevolent deity. Develop a thesis that compares the theodicy of one or more of the following: Cleanthes at the end of Hume's Dialogue, the Turkish *dervish* (i.e., philosopher) at the end of *Candide*, Martin, Pangloss.

Voltaire is obviously, as a satirist, pushing a point of view on a number of topics in *Candide*, yet he chooses to write a narrative rather than speak directly. What is gained or lost by Voltaire's not stating his position outright?

What is the target of satire, over-all, in *Candide*? If the satire is directed principally at “Optimism”, why does Pangloss have such a minor role? Why does the book conclude with the advice: “Let us cultivate our garden”? Is this a sound piece of ethical wisdom? Most of the events that might spur one to renounce optimism are not human in origin. Offhand, I can think only of two: the plague (mentioned by the old woman) and the earthquake at Lisbon, which was a topic of much philosophic comment at the end of the eighteenth-century, and even here, the issue has mostly to do with human responses to the disaster. Is the book, then, not concerned with theodicy? Does this help explain the inclusion of the El Dorado episode in the book?

Discuss the El Dorado episode and its relation to the rest of the text in any way that seems illuminating of the whole. Why does Candide choose to leave it? Would you leave it? More importantly, given his characteristic way of behaving, was Candide wise or foolish in leaving it? What view do you think Voltaire meant the reader to take of El Dorado?

"This is the best of all possible worlds." Some take this as an expression of optimism, others of deep pessimism. Are both views represented in *Candide*? On which side (optimist or pessimist) would you put Hume's Cleanthes and why? How would Cleanthes fare with his religious position in El Dorado?

Outline the course of discussion in Hume's *Dialogues*. (This is quite distinct from providing a summary. Who speaks? What do they stand for? How does the discussion proceed? What are the major topics and why are they raised in the order in which Hume presents them?)

Hume's *Dialogues* begins (in a passage that I did not have you read) with a discussion of the appropriateness of the dialogue form to certain topics. What is gained or lost by Hume not addressing his reader in his own person? With whom do you think his sympathies are most invested—Philo or Cleanthes? Argue the validity of your answer.

Identify the elements of the quarrel between Cleanthes and Philo as they first make their appearance in Part II? Do they remain the basis throughout? Philo gives an account of Cleanthes's position to which Cleanthes assents. Roughly: experience shows us that matter does not spontaneously order itself but ideas do. How close is this to the position taken by Aristotle in dealing with chance in his quarrel with Empedocles?

The last question might be extended: the self-evidence of design, insisted upon by Cleanthes, is Aristotelian; in contrast, the notion that the design is not inherent in things but has to come from an external source (and ultimately from a deliberating intelligence) is not. What would Aristotle have made of this text if he could have read it?

What is the point of the two examples—the voice in heaven and the library of vegetables—adduced in Part III against objections that Philo has made up to that moment? Are they well chosen to make Cleanthes's case? The idea of a vegetating library used to be thought particularly absurd by scholars and was often used to argue that Hume sided with Philo rather than with Cleanthes? Comment.

In Part IV, Philo makes a point by alluding to an Indian myth explaining the earth's position in the cosmos. The myth has it that the earth is supported on the back of an elephant. Is this a bad explanation? Philo thinks so, and applies it to what Cleanthes has been saying, that the order or design of material features of the world imply an orderer or a designer. He offers an Aristotelian view of things in contrast (without mentioning Aristotle). Cleanthes replies by adducing the Principle of Sufficient Reason—I have accounted for design. That is enough. Is his reply the right one?

In Part VII, Philo makes a point against Demea by again reverting to Aristotle: Demea insists at moments in the text that tracing back the chain of causation requires something more than just an endless chain. Something must have been responsible for the initiation of the chain of causes, to get things going (an application of the principle of Sufficient Reason to the whole chain). Philo tries to short-circuit Demea's argument at this juncture by

reviving the idea that substance can have a principle of growth in itself. How good are the cases at this point? Has Philo simply revived his earlier notion in Part IV or has he advanced his conception?

In Part V, Philo suggests two possibilities that follow from Cleanthes's views—that the world is a botch-job, but we cannot tell, being inferior to the divine workman, or that it isn't a botch-job but was put together over many generations by relatively unintelligent beings. Elucidate these possibilities. Is Cleanthes right in his response to them?

At the outset of Part XI, Cleanthes has something to say about the idea of *infinity* and it leads him to conclude that we have no option but to think that God is benevolent, but limited by necessity. What is the force of this argument? How does it relate to the notion that this is, after all, "the best of all possible worlds"?

In Part XI, Philo raises four objections to Cleanthes view that the world shows evidence of a benevolent (and perhaps limited) Creator. Are these objections sound? How good are Philo's answers to them?

Many scholars believed that Hume did not publish this text in his lifetime because he believed its view too radical to be exposed to the general public. What, in your opinion, is radical about the text? Is there such a thing as forbidden knowledge, of which the "innocent" should not partake?