

LANGARA COLLEGE

**Philosophy 1140, Section 001**

**Essay #1** (to be handed in March 10)

Write an argumentative essay of about 1200 words. Choose *one* of the essay questions below, or develop one for yourself.

1. Does any cosmological argument work? What's the strongest conclusion that one can draw from arguments of this type?
2. Is any version of the argument from design successful? State what you believe to be the strongest argument from design and consider the main objections to it, evaluating their degree of success. (For example, you might look at the essay by Robin Collins on the fine tuning argument.)
3. Is the notion of a *necessary* being coherent? Does it help a theist's case to claim that God is a necessary being, or is it a source of difficulty? Consider at least one argument that a necessary being exists, and evaluate it. For example, does the Principle of Sufficient Reason establish that a necessary being exists? Or, if logical laws transcend culture and biology, does this require the existence of a necessary being?
4. In his article "God's Necessary Existence" (p. 234 in our textbook), John Hick rejects the idea that God's existence is logically necessary. He claims instead that God's *aseity*, or self-existence, is itself a kind of 'necessity' that he calls "ontological or factual necessity" (p. 236), and that this is the only kind of necessity that should be attributed to God. Moreover, Hick claims (p. 237) that, "it is meaningless to say of the self-existent being that he might not have existed or that he merely happens to exist". Present Hick's arguments for some of these claims and evaluate them.
5. Is the divine command theory refuted by the Euthyphro problem? Or can a theist answer this objection successfully? Argue for your conclusion. (You might want to look at Alston's "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists", which is now on the iweb, or Bill Craig's opening statement in his debate with Shelly Kagan.)

6. One theory about how a universal morality can exist, within a naturalistic framework, is provided by Christopher Boehm in *Moral Origins: The Evolution of Virtue, Altruism, and Shame*. (See the interview article by Megan Gambino on iweb, Extra Readings.) According to Boehm, human nature has been shaped by our ancestors' need to cooperate, in small hunter-gatherer groups. Getting by requires getting along, and so cheats, thieves, bullies, free-riders and psychopaths were ruthlessly weeded out, which ultimately bred us to be tribal, punitive, gossipy, religious and cooperative.

Present this theory of human morality (or a similar one) in more detail, and then evaluate it. In your discussion you might raise such questions as the following:

- Does this view account for the moral beliefs and intuitions that we actually have?
  - Does this view give us a *reason* to be moral, especially in cases where the morally correct choice conflicts with our personal goals?
  - Does this view also (potentially) provide a grounding for other kinds of normativity (knowledge, health, logical consequence, truth, etc.)?
7. C. S. Lewis (pp. 197-201) claims that we are all aware of, and feel required to obey, an objective "Law of Human Nature". Also, Lewis argues that the best explanation for this fact is that "what is behind the universe is more like a mind than it is like anything else we know", since "you can hardly imagine a bit of matter giving instructions". Compare Lewis's theory to Boehm's, from the previous question.
  8. In their debate (available on YouTube, and a transcript of his opening statement is on the iweb) Shelly Kagan offers an "outline of a secular approach to morality", which he says provides moral rules that are "not a mere matter of opinion but rather a matter of objective fact". Summarise Kagan's secular approach to morality, and then consider at least two objections to it. Is Kagan's theory able to overcome these objections?
  9. Is it possible to show that the presence of evil in the world is logically inconsistent with the existence of a God who is both omnipotent and perfectly good? If so, then present an argument to show this (such as J. L. Mackie's) and defend it from objections. If not, then present objections to Mackie's argument.

10. Richard Swinburne writes (see reading on iweb)

But where the crunch comes, it seems to me, is in the amount of evil which exists in our world. The antitheodist says, all right, it would not be wrong to create men able to harm each other, but it would be wrong to create men able to put each other in Belsen. It would not be wrong to create backaches and headaches, even severe ones, as biological warnings, but not the long severe incurable pain of some diseases.

Overall, are the quantity and types of evil observed in the world a severe problem for theism? Argue for your conclusion.