

First paper assignment: ungraded first draft

PHIL 20810: Philosophical Theology

Due: February 14

Below is a description of your first paper assignment. As an alternative to doing this assignment, you may come up with your own topic, though you must get the written approval of me or your TA by email first. If you do this, the question that I or your TA approves should be on the first page of your essay.

You should submit your paper to your TA as an email attachment.

A late penalty of 3 points per day, including weekends, will be assessed for any papers which are handed in late. Since this is an ungraded draft, late penalties will apply to the graded final version.

Plagiarism is a serious and growing problem at Notre Dame and other universities. It is your responsibility to acquaint yourselves with the University's honor code, as well as with the philosophy department's guidelines regarding plagiarism. Both are linked from the course web site and you should contact your TA or me if you should have any questions.

The characteristic style of late medieval philosophy was the *disputational style*. Papers in this class will be modeled on this style.

In the disputational style, which you've already seen in some of the excerpts from Aquinas, we get (1) a brief, clear statement of the thesis to be argued for or against; (2) an argument for or against that thesis; and (3) a clear statement of, and consideration of the force of, one or more objections to the argument given in (2).

You may choose to argue for or against any one of the following theses:

- (1) If a situation is impossible, then even God cannot bring it about.
- (2) Some situations are possible, and yet God cannot bring them about.
- (3) The ability to do evil is important enough that God was justified in giving us this ability, despite the suffering it has caused.
- (4) If a perfectly good being could omit a horror from the world without making the world any worse, he would.
- (5) It is possible for God to do evil.
- (6) It is impossible for a being to be both essentially perfectly good and omnipotent.

In this first ungraded draft, you should do only one thing: give an argument, in 1000 words or less, for or against one of theses (1)-(6). You will be evaluated on the clarity, cogency, and originality of your argument, and that is all.

A good rule for writing your papers is: if something does not contribute to the clarity, cogency, or originality of your argument, you should delete it.

That means that you do not have to do any of the following things:

- Write an introductory paragraph.
- Write a concluding, 'summing up' paragraph.
- Avoid using "I".
- Avoid repeating terms.

Here are some things you should do:

- Write, as much as possible, using simple words and simple sentences which make your point clear.
- Be specific about the premises you are using to argue for or against your chosen thesis.