

Follow-up (Oct. 20)...What to keep in mind concerning your papers

Note that the rough draft of your paper is due Nov. 17th. You should already be thinking about a topic now. Please keep in mind that:

1. I've posted quite a bit of detailed material concerning desirable content and form (see last item in Materials for Exams and Assignments, the **Important Guidelines for the Paper**). Don't feel constrained by what I wrote concerning form: don't think that *either* your paper will be a position paper *or* a critical review...chances are it may fall in between those two types. Basically, what it boils down to is that a good philosophy paper/essay consists of: a) a clear, manageable, and focused topic, b) clear, seamless writing which exhibits: c) an optimal balance between explanation and argumentation. This usually requires developing (at most) *one* line of thinking/reasoning, rather than stating a bunch of separate points.
2. As far as topics go, my experience is many of you (~40%) choose to write on God and theological matters. **I strongly discourage you to write a paper on God's existence, unless you think you have some original argument (for or against God's existence)**. If you think you do, you had better run it by me first – preferably by appointment, but you can email me a skeleton version of your argument. Keep in mind in PHIL100 we have already surveyed and critiqued three central theological arguments: ontological (Anselm), cosmological/causal (Aquinas: Ways I, II, IV), teleological/design (Aquinas: Way V). It's pretty hard to consider some metaphysical category involving theological matters that go outside the three aforementioned. Even Descartes' seemingly original argument is really a combination of a) and b).
3. Having said that, I'm not discouraging you from writing a paper on God and theological issues. Here are my suggestions. You'll notice all three topics cover three significant areas, but these are topic we haven't studied in PHIL100, so you'll learn something investigating them. But above all, these topics, in my opinion, are sufficiently focused enough for you to write a good PHIL100 essay on:
 - The *privatio boni* (or evil as defined as absence-of-goodness) answer to the Problem of Evil (St. Augustine)
 - Blaise Pascal's *Wager* (an epistemological case for the justification of faith)
 - The Anthropic Principle vis-à-vis design arguments (The Anthropic Principle is a contemporary notion—first proposed by physicist John Wheeler, which claims that we live in a wildly improbable universe: i.e., the fundamental physical constants have particular values enabling it to be possible for our universe to have evolved with its degree of complexity supporting phenomena like life and consciousness.)

4. If you don't wish to write on theological subjects, but are having difficulty choosing a topic, you could also refer to Appendix VI of the text (p. 785) and look over the summaries of well-known philosophical puzzles and paradoxes—any one of them could be the subject of a good paper topic.