

Second Discussion Paper (Due Friday, March 4):

Write a five-page essay on one of the following topics.

1. Boethius tries to resolve what he sees as the conflict between free will and divine omniscience by arguing that we are wrong to locate God's knowledge in time and that, therefore, we are wrong to characterize divine knowledge as *foreknowledge*. In your opinion, is there a problem in the first place and is Boethius' solution a viable one?

2. Boethius, like Plato, argues that the highest kind of happiness is that which comes with the exercise of the intellect. Montaigne argues more or less the opposite, that the happiest form of life is that of the simple artisan, that intelligence brings misery and madness. What is your view?

3. Montaigne writes, "We are Christians in the same way that we are Perigordians or Germans." Do you agree or disagree? If you disagree, explain why. If you agree, explain what are the consequences for understanding the nature of religious belief.

4. According to Montaigne, an important consequence of our recognizing the limits of human reason is our realizing that the best course of action for us is simple, unquestioning acceptance of the customs and conventions into which we are born. He writes:

"And when I am not capable of choosing, I take someone else's choice and hold myself in the place where God has put me. Otherwise I would not know how to keep myself from rolling endlessly. Thus by the grace of god I have preserved entirely, without agitation and trouble of conscience, the ancient beliefs of our religion through all the sects and divisions our century has produced."

Do you agree or disagree?

5. Confronted by evidence of the unreliability of human reason, Montaigne recommends the attitude of *ataraxia*, the suspension of judgment. Descartes, on the other hand, reacts to the very same evidence by searching for some ground of certainty, which he claims to find in the *cogito*, and then sets about reconstructing much of human faith and knowledge on that foundation. Which do you think the more reasonable response to the limitations of human reason?

6. In *Meditation Three* and *Meditation Five*, Descartes gives us rational arguments purporting to prove God's existence. Do you think that these arguments are persuasive? On your view, what role ought such rational arguments play in matters of faith?

7. Descartes argues that animals are mere soulless automatons. Montaigne argues that humans are more like other animals than human pride might lead us to think. Which view is the right view?