

Third Discussion Paper (Due Friday, April 8):

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

1. According to David Hume, the claim that a specific miracle occurred falls in the category that he terms “matters of fact” and therefore should be evaluated exclusively on the basis of the same kinds of evidentiary considerations that we apply in evaluating any other factual claim. Is this the right way to adjudicate claims about miracles, and is Hume’s skepticism about miracles justified?

2. Hume thinks that the age-old argument over free will versus determinism is merely a verbal dispute, that if we define the terms “necessity” and “free will” clearly, we will see that belief in both entails no contradiction. How does that argument work, and do you think that Hume is right?

3. Hume is an empiricist. He argues that all of our ideas are derived, ultimately, from antecedent impressions. What are some of the more important consequences of this doctrine? Is Hume right?

4. In *Candide*, Voltaire mocks Leibniz’s famous solution to the problem of evil, which was expressed in the claim that this is the “best of all possible worlds.” How does Leibniz’s argument work? Do you believe that it’s a reasonable solution to the problem of evil?

5. The fantastic adventures in *Candide* come to an end with Candide and friends settling upon a small farm and abiding by Candide’s own concluding words: “We must cultivate our garden.” How do you interpret that advice? Do you think that it is the right guide to life?

6. In his essay, *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill argues that, in a democracy, the greatest threat to human freedom is “the tyranny of the majority.” What did he mean by this? Do you agree?

7. One of Mill’s two positive principles defended in *On Liberty* is this:

The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant.

Do you agree? In your essay, be sure to discuss specific examples.

8. The other positive principle that Mill defends in *On Liberty* is that the full development of the individual’s potential is possible only in a society that fosters “variety of situations,” that is to say, a society that not merely tolerates but actively promotes or encourages people’s pursuing different styles of life. Why does he think that this is necessary? Do you agree?

9. Compare Mill’s attitude toward custom and tradition with that of Montaigne.