

Fourth Discussion Paper (Due Monday, May 2):

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

1. Benedict XVI wants to begin his papacy by having the Church make a major intellectual and theological statement about the place of science in human affairs. Thus, the Vatican will host a major conference of scientists, engineers, political leaders, theologians, and, philosophers, the theme of which will be “Science, Technology, and Religion: A New Beginning.” In preparation for this conference, the Vatican seeks to hire a small group of researchers for the purpose of drafting a working paper on the conference theme, a paper that will set out discussion points and suggestions about how the Church might want to view the issues. Thanks to your training here at Notre Dame, you have been invited to apply for one of these positions, and, as part of your application, you are to write a short essay sketching your own, preliminary thoughts on the subject. Write that essay.

2. So the Vatican hired somebody else. That’s okay. Your other application was successful, and now you’re working in the office of the White House Science Advisor. The spirit of a new millennium is very much alive there. You’ve been asked to prepare a first draft of a new Presidential Statement on “Science, Technology, and Democracy in the Twenty-first Century.” The point is to establish a new “philosophical” framework for science and technology policy, a framework that will guide decision making within the government when it comes to such things as federal funding of scientific research, government regulation of emerging technologies, citizen involvement in science and technology policy formation, and many other such topics. In other words, this statement will address the big questions about the place of science and technology in human affairs and the way in which federal government policy can and should (or should not) influence how our lives are changed, in the future, by science and technology. Write that first draft.

3. Well, the President’s Science Advisor was so ticked off by the fact that your draft of that policy statement didn’t toe the party line that you’ve been fired. Life is hard. But the public uproar about your firing brought you to the attention of a private foundation, the Pugwash Foundation, that devotes all of its resources to questions of science and values. The project for which you’ve been hired is the drafting of a new “Code of Ethics” for all professional scientists and engineers, the point of which is to express a common, core understanding about the ethical responsibilities of scientists and engineers. No one will be compelled to subscribe to this code of ethics, but it is hoped that the Foundation’s prestige is such as to make subscribing an attractive thing to do, and, in any case, publicizing the code is expected to generate a broad discussion of the ethical responsibilities of scientists. You are to write a first draft of this code. The code should include an array of specific provisions as well as a more theoretical or, if you will, philosophical preamble. One point of controversy has already emerged: Should this code include a kind of Hippocratic Oath—a “cause no harm” oath—for scientists?