

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Philosophy 190

You may write on any three of the following questions, or on all four. In either case, divide your time equally among the questions.

1. "...the absurd is the contrary of hope" (Camus, p.26). How does Camus envision "hope" in this remark? (Cp., "The absurd, which is the meta-physical state of the conscious man, does not lead to God", p.30). Compare this with Wisdom's suggestion that the man who believes does not necessarily expect anything the nonbeliever does not expect --"and yet the belief makes a difference". What difference? And what difference would the acceptance of the absurd make, according to Camus? And, in these terms, what difference Kierkegaard's faith? To what difference (what "hope", what "faith", what future) do Neitzsche and Lawrence aspire?

2. "The reason I cannot accept any of the current religious philosophers is that they are all crazy in one very basic respect - their denial of nature and attempt to push man out of nature." Which among the writers we have read seem to find themselves in something like this position?

3. When Stephen Dedalus, in Ulysses, is asked whether he believes in "creation from nothing and miracles and a personal God", that is to say, whether he believes "in the narrow sense of the word", his reply is that there is only one sense of the word.

The quotation from Allen Tate which we discussed early in the term was this: "In the first place, I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord. What it means to believe this is a complex problem: how deeply I believe it, on what occasions I am conscious of the belief, how often I doubt it, the extent to which the concomitant habit of unbelief in other, contradictory dogmas qualifies my effective use of the first clause of the Creed, I am not prepared to say."

Write an essay comparing these positions in as much detail as you can, referring to any of the reading of the course which seems relevant.

4. "...the most perceptive theologians wish to translate what they have to say to an atheistic world. But they are doomed to one of two failures. Either they succeed in their translations: in which case what they find themselves saying has been transformed into the atheism of their hearers. Or they fail in their translation: in which case no one hears what they have to say but themselves."

Compare: Translators (say from English to German) are doomed to one of two failures. Either they succeed, in which case what they say is transformed into German. Or they fail, in which case no one understands what they say except themselves.

Does this analogy seem fair? Perhaps one will say: the critic of theology doesn't mean "translate" in that sense. Then in what sense does he mean it? And if the sense is something like "paraphrase" or "interpret", does the original dilemma remain? Be sure to use examples in your discussion.