

In your first paper you presented Sextus's best arguments for and against the existence of God. After marshaling objections against each of them, you evaluated these arguments and decided in favor of one, the other, or a suspension of judgment. In this, your second, paper, you will extend your discussion of God's existence by introducing new arguments from Nietzsche and Freud, concluding with an even richer assessment of the question.

Begin by editing your first paper according to my comments. Endeavor to learn from them. Although I edited the first papers carefully, I rarely deducted any points for poor grammar or spelling. These second papers, however, I will grade not only for substance but also for style. Mistakes from the first papers that have gone uncorrected will prove costly this time around. This holds likewise for inadequate citation and quotation. As I urged you for the first paper I urge you again: whenever you make a claim about a text, cite the text. Citations are the data of the humanities.

Nietzsche and Freud are each critical of religion. In the second half of this paper, then, present their best arguments against God's existence. Much as you did in your first paper, choose Nietzsche's best argument, present it (2 pages), and then marshal an objection against it (1 page). Do the same for Freud (another 3 pages). In another page or two, assess whether Nietzsche or Freud or both repeat Sextus's argument against God's existence, or whether they develop new arguments. Do Nietzsche and Freud present the same argument, albeit in different terms? Or do they present different arguments?

In the final two or three pages, present the conclusions of your investigation. Build to a conclusion of the same form that you used to conclude your first paper: "In light of these arguments, the objections that can be raised against them, and the resources available to them for reply to these objections, it is most reasonable to..." Fill in the ellipses with a clause that presents the results of your investigation: "believe that God exists," or "believe that God does not exist," or "suspend judgment about the existence of God."

If you think it most reasonable to believe that God does not exist, which of the arguments that you have presented against His existence is best: Sextus's, Nietzsche's, Freud's? Assess their relative merits. Are these arguments mutually supporting? Or are they mutually exclusive? Will the best of them withstand all objections? If not, what are its weaknesses?

Most of the arguments about God that we read in this class were against His existence. (By the way, this was unintentional, and I plan to remedy it when I teach this class next semester by adding St. Augustine to the curriculum.) Thus, if you think it most reasonable to believe in God's existence, despite these several criticisms, explain why. Feel free to develop new arguments of your own, especially if you find Sextus's best argument in favor of God's existence wanting.

One technique you could use to strengthen Sextus's argument in favor of God's existence, if you so choose, is to raise against it an objection or two that occur in Nietzsche and Freud specifically against it or one of its premises. If you prove able to meet these new objections with a reply, you have shown your favored argument to be more resilient than it might otherwise have appeared. You may also find that thoughts from Nietzsche or Freud can be used to criticize Sextus's best argument against God's existence, or even to criticize each other. There are many possibilities, and this paper is designed to permit more creativity of approach.

Once you have finished your paper, return to the beginning and rewrite your original introduction. This should occupy your first page and should forecast the structure of your new paper. As before, aspire to clarity above eloquence. The goal of this paper, like the first, is to encourage you to think through a problem dialectically; a necessary condition of dialectical success is a clear structure. Ultimately, however, I hope writing this paper will enrich your appreciation of the question's complexity, whatever answer you light upon in the end.

Pages: 18–20

Font: 12 point

Margins: Same as this prompt (i.e., standard Word margins)

Spacing: Double