

Research Project Topics

Research one of the topics below. Write a report on your research no longer than 1800 words, about 5-6 pages. Please turn your paper in to Michael Green's box in the Philosophy office, Pearsons 208, by 2:30 pm on Monday, November 12. If your paper will be late, please note when you are turning it in on the first page. Thank you. [Updated October 25 to permit tabloids in the third project.]

1 Hamlet

I told you what I think of the ghost. On the one hand, the good Protestant students, Hamlet and Horatio, would have expected the ghost to be a demon. On the other hand, Hamlet, at least, found the ghost compelling enough to consider that it might be telling the truth. I was persuaded by reading the relevant chapter of J.D. Wilson's *What Happens in Hamlet* (Cambridge University Press, various editions between the 1930s and 1950s). What do other scholars think of Wilson's interpretation?

This project involves researching the critical literature on Hamlet, looking specifically for those who comment on Wilson's interpretation of the ghost. What are the competing interpretations? Who makes them and how do they support them?

Those doing this project should begin with reference works that cover critical interpretations of literature and indexes of scholarly work on English literature.

2 Miracles in Hume

In the second part of the section on miracles, Hume describes several cases of claimed miracles. Choose one of these cases. Using sources independent of Hume, find out what happened and explain the significance of the story for Hume's purposes.

This project involves historical research. You need to find out what happened in the specific case that Hume mentions as well as learning enough about the background to explain it. For example, in the case of Alexander and Lucian, you need to look up the specific hoax and you need to learn some basic facts about the Roman empire at the time. To explain the case of Vespasian's cures, you have to know who the Flavian family was. In the case of the tomb of the Abbé Paris, you would have to look into a specific historical event as well as the conflict between Jansenists and Jesuits. And so on.

Those doing this project might begin with an annotated or critical edition of Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* such as the Clarendon edition (call number: B148o 2000).

3 Miracles today

Contrary to what Protestants in the early modern period claimed, miracles have not ceased. At least, reported miracles have not ceased. Do a study of miracles today. What do reported miracles have in common? What evidence is given that miraculous events have occurred? To what extent do contemporary reports of miracles conform to Hume's model?

Those doing this project might begin with news reports. How do major newspapers, and perhaps tabloids, report putative miracles? What sorts of miracles do people claim to experience these days?

Another promising area of research is the Catholic Church. The previous Pope, John Paul II was quite keen on identifying new saints and the performance of a miracle is a necessary condition of being named a saint. The Church has procedures and standards for identifying and confirming reported miracles. What are they and do they pass muster with Hume's criticisms?

Note that if you feel inclined to approach this project with a snarky attitude, you're almost surely better off doing one of the others. Your project will very likely be much more interesting.