Write a short (6-10 page typed) essay on a topic of your choice relating to Proto-Indo-European and/or Proto-Indo-Iranian religious beliefs and practices or mythology. You are free to explore any topic you choose, but you should synthesize the information presented in class and in the assigned readings. Below are some suggested topics, but you may alter them or devise others as you wish.

1. Identify and discuss common elements in Vedism and Zoroastrianism that might be relics of an earlier Indo-Iranian religion. Although Zoroastrianism is often said to be a ‘reaction’ to Vedism, in what respects does it continue Vedic practices and beliefs unchanged?

2. In what respects do reconstructed Proto-Indo-European gods and myths reflect the social and economic conditions of the PIE population, as they are envisaged by Anthony?

3. Compare and contrast Hittite religion and mythology with the Indo-Iranian tradition of the Vedas and the Avesta. Although few etymological comparisons are available, are there functional parallels between Hittite gods, rituals and myths and other Indo-European ones?

4. What purpose does the sacrificial ritual serve in Vedism, Zoroastrianism and in Hittite religion? How do these cultures differ in their attitudes towards and practice of the sacrifice?

5. Discuss the idea of ritual contamination, impurity and defilement on the one hand vs. purification and cleansing on the other, in both the Hittite religious and legal traditions and in Zoroastrianism. What is the source of defilement? What steps can be taken to escape from it or remedy it?

6. Zoroastrianism is often described as one of the world’s first ‘monotheistic’ religions. Yet the world of the Avesta is populated by myriad characters inhabiting a supramundane universe. How then, does Zoroastrianism really differ from Vedism and the Hittite religion, both of which recognize a multiplicity of deities?

7. The Nuristani of eastern Afghanistan speak languages which comprise a distinct branch of Indo-Iranian which presumably split very early from Indic and Iranian. For this reason pre-Islamic Nuristani religious traditions and beliefs, which survived until the 19th century, could, in principle, be extremely informative regarding the origins of the Indo-Iranian worldview. Examine the paper by Witzel and discuss what commonalities and differences exist between properties of the Nuristani religious system that he cites and the Indo-Iranian system as reconstructed through the Vedas and Avesta.