

History of Modern Philosophy Exam

Answer exactly three questions, including at least one question from section 1 and at least one question from section 2. In each case, you should defend your claims as well as you can and make your answers as detailed as possible. You have two hours for the entire examination, so you should devote approximately 40 minutes to each answer.

Section 1

1. Discuss the claim, made since Descartes' own time, that the *Meditations* includes a circular argument. What is the circle supposed to be? How might Descartes defend himself against this charge? Do you think the charge is correct? Defend your answer.
2. You may answer either of the following questions, but not both:
 - 2a. How could key doctrines of Leibniz's seem to entail necessitarianism? How does he attempt to avoid necessitarianism? Does he succeed?

OR

- 2b. Leibniz argues that this (i.e., the actual) world is the best possible world. What is a possible world? How does Leibniz try to show that this is the best of all possible worlds? Specifically, how does he respond to the objection that there are obvious ways in which the actual world could be better than it is?
3. Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz are usually classified together as rationalists. What common aspects of their views lead to this grouping? Are there any important ways in which it is misleading?
4. Compare the metaphysical positions of two of the following on what a rock is: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz.
5. Compare and contrast the positions of Descartes and Spinoza on the mind-body problem.
6. Explain and contrast the views on causation held by *three* of the following philosophers: Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza, Leibniz.

Section 2

- 7.** Present Locke's distinction between nominal essence and real essence, and explain the role it plays in his critique of Aristotelian metaphysics. Why does he think it is unlikely that science will ever be able to discover the real essence of material objects? Do you accept his distinction? If so, do you agree with his skepticism about scientific knowledge of real essences?
- 8.** What, in their essentials, are Berkeley's arguments against the existence of mind-independent material objects and properties? Are those arguments good? If so, defend them against a plausible objection. If not, where do they go wrong?
- 9.** Explain and contrast the views on the distinction between primary and secondary qualities held by Locke and Berkeley.
- 10.** Describe the views of Locke and Hume on personal identity. How do they defend their views of this matter? How plausible are their views?
- 11.** Locke, Berkeley and Hume are usually classified together as empiricists. What common aspects of their views lead to this grouping? Are there any important ways in which it is misleading?
- 12.** Compare the views of two of the following on substance: Locke, Berkeley, Hume.
- 13.** Explain Hume's views on induction. How does he argue for his position? What follows if he is right? Briefly sketch a response to Hume's argument.