

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. You may answer either of the following questions, but **not both**:

1a. 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.

1b. Descartes's *Meditations* begins:

Some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I have accepted as true in my childhood, and by the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice that I had subsequently based on them. I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable and likely to last.

Explain and suggest answers to the various puzzles these sentences raise.

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?

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. For what reasons have people thought that Descartes had a problem with mind-body interaction? Carefully explain the views of *Malebranche*, *Leibniz*, and *Spinoza* on mind-body interaction.

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. Compare the views of two of the following on substance: Locke, Berkeley, Hume.
12. 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.
13. You may answer either of the following questions, but **not both**:
 - 13a. Explain how Hobbes believes language transforms thought. What are some of the uses of language, according to Hobbes? Why is a creature without language incapable of general or abstract thought?
 - 13b. According to Hobbes, reasoning is a form of reckoning. What does this mean? Could a creature without language *reason* in this sense? If not, what kinds of 'reasoning' and learning are non-linguistic creatures capable of?