

Questions to Prepare for the Midterm

For the midterm exam, you will be asked to respond to some subset of the questions listed here. While these questions are mainly focused on the work of individual philosophers, attempts to assimilate the work of several philosophers will be appreciated. Try to contextualize your responses with reference to philosophical themes (e.g. free will, the self, the nature of mind) while responding directly to the question. The quality of your writing will also factor into your grade.

Descartes

1. What does Descartes want to raze to the ground? What is his goal?
4. How does Descartes come to doubt all of what his senses tell him?
5. How are general things less doubtful than particulars?
6. Of what does Descartes think might be certain even if he is dreaming?
7. What makes Descartes doubt the truth of mathematics?
8. "But eventually I am forced to admit that there is nothing among the things I once believed to be true which it is not permissible to doubt - and not out of frivolity or lack of forethought, but for valid and considered reasons" (AW 42b). Explain what these three reasons are.
10. What is the first thing that Descartes claims he can not doubt? Why can't he doubt it?
11. What is a body? Does the cogito prove the existence of our bodies?
12. What is imagining? Why is it irrelevant to our knowledge of ourselves?
13. Describe the self, and its faculties, especially sensing.
14. How does Descartes argue that he perceives what the wax is through the mind alone?
19. What general rule does Descartes accept as a criterion for knowledge? How does he arrive at this rule?
22. What are the three sources of ideas? Characterize each, providing examples.
23. "Nothing is more obvious than the judgment that this thing is sending its likeness rather than something else into me" (AW 49a). Explain.
26. How does the example of the sun contravene the claim in Question 23?
29. What role does the claim that something can not come from nothing play in Descartes's Third-Meditation argument for the existence of God?
42. What potential problem does Descartes find in supposing God not to be a deceiver? How does he arrive at this problem?
46. How does the difference between the will and the intellect cause error? Describe each faculty and its function.
54. How does Descartes argue that we do not acquire our geometric ideas from our senses?
56. "Thus it is no less contradictory to think of God... lacking existence... than it is to think of a mountain without a valley" (AW 59b) Why? Be specific.
68. "[M]y ability clearly and distinctly to understand one thing without another suffices to make me certain that the one thing is different from the other..." (AW 64a). Explain. What does this mean about the relationship between the mind and the body?
73. Describe the relationship between our selves and our bodies. (See also *Discourse* AW 34.)
75. "[F]rom the fact that I sense a wide variety of colors, sounds, odors, tastes, levels of heat, and grades of roughness, and the like, I rightly conclude that in the bodies from which these different perceptions of the sense proceed there are differences corresponding to the different perceptions..." (65a). Distinguish this claim from the resemblance hypothesis.
82. How does Descartes argue that we can distinguish dreams from waking experience? Why is this argument acceptable in Meditation VI, when it would not have been acceptable in Meditation I?

Hobbes

1. How do thoughts originate? Be specific.
 2. What is the relationship between inertia and memory?
 4. Explain the analogy of the sequence of thought to water on a table.
 13. What's wrong with saying that color is in a body (as in 'the apple is red')?
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Spinoza

22. Distinguish substances, modes, and attributes.
 24. How does Spinoza argue that there can be only one substance of any particular nature?
 28. Characterize Spinoza's conception of God. How is it different from ordinary conceptions?
 32. "Particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God, that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way" (Proposition 25). Explain.
 34. How does Spinoza conclude that nothing in nature is contingent? Consider his characterizations of 'contingent', 'necessary', and 'impossible' in Proposition 33.
 39. Explain Proposition 7: The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things. Does Descartes agree?
 50. What are the three kinds of knowledge? How do they differ?
 51. How does Spinoza account for falsity? Why is such an account both difficult and important, for him?
 55. Distinguish passive and active states of the mind. How does this distinction help explain human freedom?
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Leibniz

1. What are monads? How do we know that there are monads?
2. How do monads differ from composites?
3. Are monads all alike? Explain.
5. How does Leibniz argue that machines (bodies) can not think?
7. "The present is pregnant with the future" (§22). Explain.
9. Describe Leibniz's two basic principles of philosophy. (The brief selection *Primary Truths*, AW 265-268) will be helpful.)
14. How does Leibniz argue that this is the best of all possible worlds?
21. How does Leibniz's view of the mind (soul)/body distinction differ from that of Descartes? How does Leibniz account for the difference?
26. What conditions are required for true predication? (Consider explicit and virtual containment.)
31. How do Leibniz's claims about monads undermine the possibility of human freedom? How does the distinction between certainty and necessity help him account for free will? Consider the Caesar example.
37. What are final and efficient causes? How does Leibniz try to rectify them?
49. How does Leibniz's parallelism combine spontaneity with conformity?
60. How does absolute time differ from relative time? Characterize each.
61. How does absolute space differ from relative space? Characterize each. What is the difference between place and space?
66. Describe Newton's bucket experiment. What does it show, and how?
71. For Leibniz, what does it mean that space and time are "merely relative" (LIII.4)?
72. How does Leibniz use the principle of sufficient reason to object to absolute space? How does he use that principle to object to absolute time?

Locke

5. What is general assent? Why does it not prove that there are innate ideas?
6. How does the example of children show that there are no innate ideas?
12. Describe and differentiate the two sources of ideas.
22. What are the primary qualities? (Provide a description and a list.)
23. What are the secondary qualities? (Provide a description and a list.)
25. How do we get ideas of secondary qualities?
26. "The ideas of primary qualities of bodies are resemblances of them, and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves, but the ideas produced in us by these secondary qualities have no resemblance of them at all." (II.VIII.15) Explain.
28. "Take away the sensation of them; let not the eyes see light or colors, nor the ears hear sounds; let the palate not taste, nor the nose smell, and all colours, tastes, odours, and sounds, as they are such particular ideas, vanish and cease, and are reduced to their causes, i.e. bulk, figure, and motion of parts." (§17) Explain.
29. How does the example of the porphyry support the primary/secondary distinction?
30. How does Locke's discussion of the water support his primary/secondary distinction?
31. How does Locke demonstrate that figure is a primary quality?
37. What is the relationship between consciousness and personal identity? Consider the role of memory.
39. Describe the case of the prince and the cobbler. What does it show?
43. Describe the case of the day and night man. What does it show?
46. How are general words made? For what do they stand?
58. Can we know that we are not dreaming? Explain Locke's answer.
65. How are we ignorant of the connection between primary and secondary qualities?
70. Are mathematical claims certain? What are the objects of these claims?