

Exam Exemplars
From Brian Cameron

4. “[M]y ability clearly and distinctly to understand one thing without another suffices to make me certain that one thing is different from the other. . .” (AQ 64a). This follows directly from the discussion in question 2. Here Descartes is appealing to the notion that clearness and distinctness guarantees truth, in that if something is clear and distinct it must be true. Descartes applies this notion to the mind / body problem. He notes that he clearly and distinctly understands the mind, and clearly and distinctly understands the body. When he thinks of a mind, it is quite obvious that it is something that thinks and reasons. When he thinks of a body, he thinks of material. And materials do not think and reason. He has done some rudimentary anatomical studies and seen that there is no way that the ‘mind’ can be measured. The mind and the brain are not one and the same. The brain is matter while the mind is something else. This, he says, is clear and distinct. Thus he has established a separation of mind and body. According to Descartes, the mind is an entirely different ‘substance’ than the body. The two are entirely separate things (although, clearly, very closely linked and intertwined).

9. Leibniz states that “the present is pregnant with the future.” This is, in many ways, a statement of determinism (although perhaps not entirely deterministic in and of itself). Leibniz was, of course, a very brilliant man who was able to observe the world and come to remarkably accurate descriptions for the way things are (he independently invented calculus- this is not a dumb man). Leibniz realized that the world could be explained almost entirely by matter and motion. There is matter, and it moves about. If you have a ball sitting on the ground, it will not suddenly jump into motion unless it is acted upon. But if a tree falls over and hits the side of the ball it will obviously be sent flying. But what caused the tree to fall? All of the things that caused the tree to fall were ‘about to happen’ one second before the tree fell. That means then, that one second before the tree fell, everything is in place → the tree falls → the ball goes flying. But we can take a step back then, and say that one moment before the tree fell, it was certain that in a few moments the ball would go flying. Essentially, all action right now is a result of matter in motion in the ‘past,’ and as an extension, all action in the ‘future’ will be a result of the matter in motion right now. So, then, we might say that the ‘present is pregnant with the future.’