

Questions for the Midterm

For the midterm exam, you will be asked to respond to a 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 factor into your grade.

Descartes

1. How does Descartes come to doubt all of what his senses tell him?
2. How are general things less doubtful than particulars?
3. Of what does Descartes think he might be certain even if he is dreaming?
4. What makes Descartes doubt the truth of mathematics?
5. "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.
6. What is the first thing that Descartes claims he can not doubt? Why can't he doubt it?
7. Describe the self, and its faculties.
8. How does Descartes argue that he perceives physical objects through the mind alone?
9. What general rule does Descartes accept as a criterion for knowledge? How does he arrive at it?
10. What are the three sources of ideas? Characterize each, providing examples.
11. "Nothing is more obvious than the judgment that this thing is sending its likeness rather than something else into me" (AW 49a). Explain. How does the example of the sun contravene this claim?
12. What role does the claim that something can not come from nothing play in Descartes's Third-Meditation argument for the existence of God?
13. For Descartes, how does the difference between the will and the intellect cause error? Describe each faculty and its function.
14. How does Descartes argue that we do not acquire our geometric ideas from our senses?
15. "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.
16. "[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?
17. How does Descartes argue, finally, that we can distinguish dreams from waking experience? Why is this argument acceptable in Meditation VI, but not acceptable in Meditation I?

Hobbes

1. In what way is Hobbes a monist? How does his monism lead to a problem of consciousness?
2. For Hobbes, what is the relationship between inertia and memory? Explain the analogy of the sequence of thought to water on a table.
3. What's wrong with saying that color is in a body (as in 'the apple is red')?

Spinoza

1. Distinguish substances, modes, and attributes.
 2. How does Spinoza argue that there can be only one substance of any particular nature?
 3. Characterize Spinoza's conception of God. How is it different from ordinary conceptions?
 4. "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.
 5. How does Spinoza argue that nothing in nature is contingent?
 6. Explain Spinoza's parallelism, the claim that the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.
 7. How does Spinoza account for falsity? Why is such an account both difficult and important, for him?
 8. Distinguish passive and active states of the mind. How does this distinction help explain human freedom?
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Locke

1. What is general assent? Does it prove that there are innate ideas?
2. How does the example of children show that there are no innate ideas?
3. Describe and differentiate the two sources of our ideas.
4. What are the primary qualities? What are the secondary qualities? Provide descriptions and a list.
5. "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.
6. "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.
7. How does the example of the porphyry support the primary/secondary distinction?
8. How does Locke's discussion of the water support his primary/secondary distinction?
9. How does Locke demonstrate that figure is a primary quality?
10. What is the relationship between consciousness and personal identity? Consider the role of memory.
11. Describe the case of the prince and the cobbler. What does it show?
12. Describe the case of the day and night man. What does it show?
13. How are general words made? For what do they stand?
14. How are we ignorant of the connection between primary and secondary qualities?
15. Are mathematical claims certain? What are the objects of these claims?

Berkeley

1. What is an object, like an apple, for Berkeley?
2. For Berkeley, what exists, besides ideas?
3. According to Berkeley, how does the notion of the independent existence of material objects depend on the doctrine of abstract ideas?
4. Why can't our ideas of objects resemble material substance? How does this show the primary/secondary distinction to be unhelpful?
5. "In short, extension, figure, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable" (*Principles* §10, AW 449a). Explain. What does this show?
6. Explain Berkeley's argument against the primary qualities from the relativity of perceptions.
7. How does the example of the mite show the relativity of extension?
8. What happens as we approach or recede from an object? What does this show, for Philonous/Berkeley?
9. How does a microscope serve to show that the appearance of figure can change?
10. What is the relation between motion and time? How is time measured? What does this mean for motion?
11. How does Philonous/Berkeley argue for the relativity of solidity?
12. "In short, if there were external bodies, it is impossible we should ever come to know it; and if there were not, we might have the very same reasons to think there were that we have now" (*Principles* §20, AW 451a). Explain.
13. Why doesn't thinking of an unperceived object refute Berkeley's idealism?
14. How does Berkeley distinguish real things from images.
15. Is Berkeley a skeptic about the external world? Explain.
16. "Consequently, the very same arguments which you admitted as conclusive against the secondary qualities are... against the primary, too" (AW 468a). Explain.
17. "But then whatever hand or eye I imagine, it must have some particular shape and color" (Berkeley, *Principles*, Introduction §10, AW 441a). Explain. How is this an argument against abstract ideas?
18. In what sense can we form abstract ideas? What are the limits to this capacity?
19. How does the notion of an abstract, general idea lead to a contradiction?
20. How does materialism lead to skepticism? How does idealism avoid skepticism?
21. For Berkeley, do we have ideas of ourselves? Explain.
22. For Berkeley, how does materialism lead to atheism?
23. "Men commonly believe that all things are known or perceived by God, because they believe the being of a God; whereas I, on the other side, immediately and necessarily conclude the being of a God, because all sensible things must be perceived by him" (AW 477a). Explain. (See also *Principles* §146 et seq.)
24. How does Berkeley attempt to show that matter is not infinitely divisible? What does this mean for geometry?
25. "There is no such thing as the ten-thousandth part of an *inch*; but there is of a *mile* or *diameter of the earth*, which may be signified by that inch" (§127). Explain. How does this indicate the basic error of the notion of infinite divisibility, for Berkeley?