

**Midterm Study Questions:
Fall 2019**

Here are some study questions to help you prepare for the mid-term on Oct. 23rd. The test will include multiple questions on each person, Descartes, Leibniz, and Locke. You will be asked to answer 5 questions in total, including at least 1 question on each philosopher. (In other words, for two of them, you must answer 2 questions, and then 1 question on the remaining person. You get to decide which.)

These study questions are to help you prepare. The questions on the test may not be worded exactly the same—they will probably be more narrow and focused. But the questions below represent the issues you will be responsible for knowing for the test.

Descartes Questions:

1. What is Descartes' overarching goal as he begins the *Meditations*? Explain his "Method of Doubt," and the role this plays in discovering an *epistemic foundation*.
2. In the First Meditation, Descartes considers the possibility that he might be dreaming. What is his point in this discussion? What is he getting at when he says that dreams are like paintings? How is this relevant to his point? Is he saying that I might have been dreaming my whole life? What kinds of beliefs about the world does this discussion of dreaming call into doubt? What kinds of beliefs does it not call into doubt? Explain why.
3. In the Second Meditation, Descartes argues that he is a thinking thing. What does he mean by this, exactly? What exactly does it mean, that is, to be a "thinking thing?" How does he know (i.e., what reasons does he give to support his belief) that he is a thinking thing? What does he say, in the Second Meditation, about whether or not he might be "more" than (merely) a thinking thing? Explain his reasoning.

4. What is the explicit aim of Descartes' discussion of the piece of wax in the Second Meditation? Explain at least one other issue that he becomes concerned with in this discussion.
5. Explain the position known as “Mind/Body Dualism” (also known as “Substance Dualism”). I’m not looking here for criticisms of it, or even the arguments that Descartes offers for it. Just explain what the position actually claims. Include in your answer a description of how mind and body differ, according to Descartes, and what it means to say that they are distinct kinds of substances.
6. Explain the account of sense perception that we discovered in the italicized passages we looked at in his Third Meditation. (This is the view I described in class as the “Theory of Ideas.”) What, on this account, do we directly perceive in sense perception? What is the role of the “real” object that (presumably) exists outside of our minds?
7. How does Descartes explain the possibility of human error in the Fourth Meditation? Be sure to include in your answer a discussion of our faculties of understanding (or “intellect”) and will.
8. Why (or how) does the fact that human beings are prone to errors of judgment count against God's goodness? Why is this a problem for Descartes? How does his discussion of this parallel classical discussions of “The Problem of Evil” in the philosophy of religion?
9. In the Sixth Meditation, Descartes offers an argument to prove the existence of material objects. Explain what the argument is, how it is supposed to work, and what some of the possible weaknesses might be.
10. In the paragraph 9 of the Sixth Meditation, Descartes reasons as follows:
First, I know that if I have a clear and distinct thought of something, God could have created it in a way that exactly corresponds to my thought. So the fact that I can clearly and distinctly think of one thing apart from another assures me that the two things are distinct from one another—that is, that

they are two—since they can be separated by God. Never mind how they could be separated; that does not affect the judgment that they are distinct. So my mind is a distinct thing from my body.

Explain his reasoning here.

11. Several paragraphs in to the Sixth Meditation Descartes claims that “Nature teaches me, through these sensations of of pain, hunger, thirst, and so on, that I (a thinking thing) am not merely in my body the way a sailor is in a ship. Rather, I am closely joined to it--intermingled with it so to speak--so that it an I form a unit.” A few paragraphs later, he concludes that “the mind isn’t immediately affected by all parts of the body but only by the brain--or perhaps just a small part of it” What is he saying in both of these passages? What is the apparent conflict between these two passages?

Leibniz Questions:

12. Explain what Leibniz means when he says that "all ... truths are reducible to ... [First Truths] by the help of definitions...." (Be sure to explain what "First Truths" are.) Then explain how this leads him to claim that "[e]very individual substance involves in its perfect concept the whole universe...."
13. Explain Leibniz' claim that "two individual things differing only in number cannot exist in nature." What does this mean, and why does Leibniz think that this is the case? How does this claim follow from his account of truth (or "predication")?
14. Explain the following remark: "A complete or perfect concept of an individual substance involves all its predicates, past, present, and future." What does this mean, and why does Leibniz think this? Explain the relevance of his account of truth to this claim.
15. Why does Leibniz think that individual things cannot causally influence each other? And how does he explain the fact that it certainly appears as if they do?

16. What is the "hypothesis of concomitance," or, as I called it in class, "The Doctrine of Pre-Established Harmony?" How does this view allow Leibniz to avoid problems a Cartesian might have in explaining how minds and bodies interact? (Be sure to explain what this problem is that Cartesians face, as well as how Leibniz can avoid it.)

17. Leibniz famously believes that we live in the "best of all possible worlds." Explain his reasoning here.

Locke Questions:

Note: These questions on Locke are tentative and subject to change. I will update them prior to the midterm. I include them here so that you have a sense of what to focus on when you read the text. Some of these issues will certainly be covered on the midterm, but maybe not all of them, and maybe other issues not mentioned here.

18. In Book I, Chapter ii of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke argues against the existence of "innate ideas." Briefly explain what such innate ideas are supposed to be. (That is, explain the position that he is rejecting.) And then briefly explain his reasons for rejecting this view.

19. Locke describes "sensation" and "reflection" as the two "fountain[s] from which experience provides ideas to the understanding..." Explain in your own words the distinction between sensation and reflection. What is he trying to say? Why does he think this distinction is important?

20. Locke claims that ideas, i.e., sensations or other "mental contents" that exist only in our minds, are "the immediate objects[s] of perception, thought, or understanding ..." [p. 54, ¶ 8] In your own words, explain what this really means, and explain, again, in your own words, the philosophical issues or reasoning that

would that would support this claim. *Why, what reason*, is there for thinking what he says here is correct?

21. Explain the distinction Locke makes between *ideas* and *qualities*. Why is this distinction so important for Locke's account of experience? Explain, in other words why, given the claims Locke is trying to defend, he *needs* to make this distinction.

22. In ¶ 8, Locke makes a clear distinction between ideas and qualities. Ideas are one thing, and qualities are something different. Yet, in the previous paragraph he states, “To reveal the nature of our ideas better, ... it will be convenient to distinguish them as they are ideas or perceptions in our minds and as they are states of matter in the bodies that cause such perceptions in us.” (Note: “states of matter in the bodies that cause ideas in us” is exactly how Locke defines “qualities” in ¶ 8.) So in this passage, he is talking about *ideas* as both “perceptions in us” and “states of matter” in external objects. And then, later in ¶ 8, Locke continues, “If I sometimes speak of ‘ideas’ as in the things themselves, please understand me to mean to be talking about the *qualities* in the objects that produce them in us.” So, he makes a clear distinction between ideas and qualities, and then, on the very same page, tells us he will often use one word when he means the other. In your own words, explain what is going on here.

23. In ¶ 9, Locke says of primary qualities that they are qualities “a body doesn’t lose ... however finely it is divided. Take a grain of wheat, divide it into two parts, each part has still solidity, extension, shape, and mobility;... go on dividing it until the parts become imperceptible, each part must still retain those qualities” *Why* does he say this? Is he just asserting this, without argument, or is there some *reasoning* that leads him to conclude that the “imperceptible” bodies will always have certain “original” properties? Explain, in your own words, how “atomism” (the view that material objects are composed of tiny particles, or “atoms”) leads us to think that the ultimate atoms out of which everything is composed *must* have some such “original” or “primary” qualities.

24. In class, I explained that (on my reading of Locke), secondary qualities are “reducible” to primary qualities. Explain what it means to say that one kind of

property is *reducible* to another, and why it makes sense to think that Locke is making this claim.

25. In ¶ 15, Locke says that “the ideas produced in us by secondary qualities don’t resemble them at all.” In other words, our *ideas* (or *sensations*) of secondary qualities do not *resemble* those secondary qualities that caused us to have these very ideas or sensations. Why does he think this? In your own words, explain Locke’s reasoning for claiming that our ideas of secondary qualities do not resemble the secondary qualities that they are ideas of.

26. What reasons are there for thinking that Locke believes that secondary qualities exist only “in” our minds? What reasons are there for thinking that he does *not* believe this?

27. Explain what “substratum” (or “substance in general”) is for Locke. What does he think this substratum is? How does he characterize it? Why does he think he needs it? That is, what are the philosophical reasons for thinking that there must be such a thing as substratum?

28. Explain Locke’s account of language. What, according to Locke, do words actually refer to? Why is this a problem? Why does it make his whole account of language incoherent? And how is this problem about his account of language similar to a problem he may have with his more general account of experience.