

Reading Questions for Phil 412.200, Spring 2012 (Daniel)

Questions on Descartes' *Meditations I & II* (Jan. 19)

1. For Descartes, why can't knowledge gained through sense experience be trusted as the basis of knowledge?
2. How are the doubts raised by our experience of dreaming different from, and more profound than, doubts raised about errors in sense experience?
3. How is the evil genius argument intended to be broader in scope than either the arguments about doubting sense experience or dreaming?
4. Why can't the evil genius persuade Descartes into thinking that he (Descartes) exists when, in fact, he might not?
5. What is the point of Descartes' doubt about having a body? Why can't a thing that thinks, an "I think" (cogito), be a body? What is a body?
6. What is the point of the wax example? How is it important in knowing the self?

Questions on Descartes' *Meditations III & IV* (Jan. 24)

1. Why is it important to Descartes to determine as early as possible whether God exists and is a deceiver?
2. How is the "spontaneous inclination" to believe that my ideas are caused by things outside me different from the "natural light" by which I can discern truth?
3. How are all ideas alike as "modes of thought"? and how are they different in terms of their "objective reality"?
4. What is the difference between the objective reality of an idea and the actual or formal reality of a thing?
5. Why is my clear and distinct idea of God as an infinite substance not something for which I could have been the cause?
6. If my will is infinite (like God's), then why would I choose to think things wrongly; that is, how can error be explained?

Questions on Descartes' *Meditations V & VI* (Jan. 26)

1. For Descartes, how can I demonstrate various properties of a thousand-sided figure (a chiliagon) without ever having seen one (or even without one ever having existed)?
2. Why is the distinction between essence and existence important in proving God exists?
3. How can material/corporeal (later: "external") objects be known clearly and distinctly?
4. What are the three possible sources of our ideas of sensible things, and how does Descartes rule out two of them in favor of the third?
5. What are Descartes' three ways of speaking about nature? How is the third way important for understanding the intimate connection between the mind and body?
6. How is the mind-body composite sometimes a source of deception?
7. How are we able to distinguish between dreaming and being awake?

Questions on Descartes' *Meditations* Objections & Replies II (Jan. 29)

1. According to Mersenne, Descartes ignores the possibility that a thinking thing might be a body. How does Descartes respond to that by distinguishing his aims in Meditation II and VI?
2. How does Descartes use the distinction between objective and formal reality to respond to Mersenne's claim that the idea of an infinite being might simply be an idea of our own existence expanded infinitely?
3. How does Descartes respond to Mersenne's point that our idea of God (like that of angels or infinite number) is not innate or planted in us by God but learned from others?
4. Mersenne says that Descartes' reasoning is circular, in that he knows that an all-good God exists because he has a clear and distinct idea of him, and he can trust such clear and distinct ideas because an all-good God would not deceive him regarding them. What is Descartes' response to this?

Questions on Descartes' *Meditations* Objections & Replies III (Jan. 31)

1. In the third set of objections, Thomas Hobbes suggests that thinking is an activity of corporeal (bodily) substances. How does Descartes respond to this by invoking the concept of the formal nature of a spiritual substance?
2. How does Descartes reject Hobbes' claim that reasoning is merely stringing names together?
3. Hobbes claims that our idea of God depends on our imagination of corporeal objects, and thus that our idea of God should involve his creation of the world. How does Descartes reject this?
4. Why does Hobbes think that his claim that "essence without existence is a fiction of our mind" is an argument against Descartes' discussion of the essence of material things?

Questions on Descartes' *Meditations* Objections & Replies IV (Feb. 2)

1. For Descartes, *judgments* (e.g., the sun goes around the earth) can be "formally false" (i.e., in conflict with reality) and still be "materially true" (i.e., conceptually possible). But *ideas* that do not represent anything in reality (e.g., heat, cold, gods) are "materially false"—that is, they have no content that can be traced to a (formally) existing referent. Using this distinction, Arnauld argues that any idea (including God) could be materially false (and not be used to conclude anything): why? How is Descartes' response—that this treats all ideas as formally true—a reply?
2. As Arnauld interprets him, Descartes claims that my idea of myself as finite is intelligible in terms of (i.e., "derived from") my idea of an infinite being—in which case I know I am the effect of an infinite cause. But as Arnauld points out, I know something as an effect only if I know it apart from its cause—so I really don't have an idea of God. How does Descartes' reply depend on distinguishing between God as a formal cause of his existence vs. as an efficient cause?
3. Why does Arnauld reject characterizing God as his own cause (primarily by not applying the distinction between creation and preservation to God)?
4. What is Descartes' reply to Arnauld's claim that the mind is unaware of many things in it?

Questions on the Letters between Princess Elizabeth and Descartes (Feb. 7)

1. What is Elizabeth's initial objection to Descartes' account of mind-body interaction? and how does Descartes reply to it by appealing to a distinction between our primitive notions of body, soul, and the body-soul union?
2. Why would thinking of the body-soul union in terms of intellect or imagination alone be a category mistake (like thinking of gravity as a real quality of bodies)?
3. How does Elizabeth respond to Descartes' invocation of the gravity example by pointing out that, using that example, we could just as easily think that the soul is material?
4. How does Descartes respond to the suggestion that the soul could be understood in a material sense?

Questions on Hobbes' *Leviathan* I.1-4 (Feb. 9)

1. How is treating the passions of "all men on like occasions" central to thinking of man as an artifice (a product of art)?
2. How does Hobbes explain our sense ideas and imagination in terms of bodies in motion? and why does this mean that the concepts of infinite power and even God are unintelligible?
3. How are trains of thought (e.g., cause and effect) regulated by means of signs in "mental discourse"?
4. How does Hobbes' account of reasoning (i.e., "mental reckoning") limit truth to the "right ordering of names"?
5. Why does this way of thinking lead Hobbes to conclude that human "understanding" is inconstant and prejudicial?

Essay Question on Hobbes' *Leviathan* I.5, III.34, IV.46 (Sunday, Feb. 12)

How does Hobbes use his generative understanding of "reason" and "philosophy" to show that concepts like incorporeal substance, essence, eternity, and even God are meaningless?

Questions on Malebranche's *Search After Truth* III.2.1-4, 6 (Feb. 14)

1. Why can't our ideas of bodies be caused by minute bodies or our minds themselves?
2. Why can't one ball's movement be the "true and principal cause" of another's movement?
3. Why can't we know about objects innately (i.e., through ideas God creates in us)?
4. How is God's being the "place of minds" related to Malebranche's claim that "we see all things in God"?

5. “We do not so much see ideas of things as things themselves represented by ideas”: what does this mean? And why does Malebranche later remark that “we do not say that we see God in seeing truths, but in seeing the *ideas* of these truths”?
6. “In the same way that we do not love anything except through the necessary love we have for God, we do not see anything except through the natural knowledge we have of God”: what does this mean?
7. How are sensations different from ideas?

Questions on Malebranche’s *Search After Truth* III.2.7, VI.2.3, *Elucidation* 15 (Feb. 16)

1. Why is everything we know known (and known perfectly) only through our union with God?
2. Why can’t we have as perfect a knowledge of the nature of the soul as that of bodies?
3. What does Malebranche mean by saying that we do not know other minds in themselves or through their ideas or through consciousness but only through conjecture?
4. What does it mean to say natural causes are not true causes but only occasional causes?
5. What is the relation of the will to bodily motion, and why must God be involved?
6. If God is the only true cause of our ideas, then how can we be free and responsible for sin?
7. Why does Malebranche reject the “concurrency” view of human actions?

Questions on Arnauld’s *True and False Ideas* II-V (Feb. 21)

1. Why can’t we perceive the mind apart from its perception (“representation”) of objects?
2. Why is there no difference (despite what Malebranche says) between an idea understood as a representation of an object and the perception of the object?
3. How is representative realism—the view that we know things only by means of ideas of them—based on the mistaken belief that whatever we think must be present to us?
4. How can something be objectively in my mind if it does not exist outside my mind?
5. Why does Arnauld separate the formal cause of an idea from its efficient cause?

Questions on Spinoza’s *Letters to Oldenburg and Meyer*, # 2, 12, 32 (Feb. 23)

1. How is the definition of an attribute central in defining God?
2. Why is there only one substance in the universe, and why must it be infinite?
3. Why can’t particular volitions be free?
4. Why can’t substance and eternity be imagined using measure, time, and number?
5. How are all bodies or minds related to one another as “affections” or parts of the universe?

Essay Question on Spinoza's *Ethics* I P 1-31 (Sunday, Feb. 26)

How is the concept of *attribute* central to Spinoza's claims that (a) only God (i.e., substance) exists and (b) nothing that follows from God's nature (*natura naturata*) is contingent?

Questions on Spinoza's *Ethics* I P 32-Appendix, II P 1-13 (Tuesday, Feb. 28)

1. How are attempts to explain natural events (e.g., storms, earthquakes, disease) in terms of final causes or divine purposes really figments of human imagination or appeals to ignorance?
2. How can God be both a thinking and an extended thing?
3. What does Spinoza mean in E IIP6cor when he says that "the formal being of things that are not modes of thinking does not follow from the nature of God by reason of his first having known them; rather, the objects of ideas follow and are inferred from their own attributes in the same way and by the same necessity as we have shown ideas to follow from the attribute of Thought"?
4. How is the order and connection of ideas the same as the order and connection of things (IIP7)?
5. What does it mean to say that God is the cause of an individual mode only insofar as he is affected by another mode of the same attribute (IIP9)?
6. How does understanding the body distinctly as the object of the idea that constitutes the human mind allow us recognize the superiority of one mind over others?

Questions on Spinoza's *Ethics* II P 14-49 (Thursday, Mar. 1)

1. How do external bodies affect the human mind in terms of imagination (i.e., bodily affects), and why is the mind's knowledge of external bodies inadequate?
2. Why doesn't the human mind "know" the human body or even itself (except insofar as it perceives ideas of affections of the body)?
3. Why can't the human mind have an adequate idea of the body, itself, or other bodies?
4. Why can we have adequate ideas only in terms of knowledge of the second and third kinds of knowledge (i.e., reason and intuition) but not knowledge of the first kind (imagination)?
5. Why are true ideas (vs. adequate ideas) known with certainty?
6. How can the human mind have an adequate knowledge of the essence of God?
7. How can will and intellect be the same when they seem so different? and what are the practical advantages of thinking of them as the same?

Questions on Spinoza's *Ethics* V P 21-42 (Tuesday, Mar. 6)

1. How does the highest possible contentment of mind consist in the third kind of knowledge?
2. How can the intellectual love of God be eternal and not continue after death?
3. How does understanding things in terms of the second and third kinds of knowledge make the mind less subject to bad emotions (e.g., fear of death)?
4. Why should we develop our bodies to be able to engage in many activities?
5. What does Spinoza mean by saying that blessedness is virtue itself?

Mid-Semester Exam Questions (Thursday, Mar. 8)

1. How does Arnauld's direct realism challenge Descartes' formal/objective-reality distinction in a way that supports Mersenne's and Elizabeth's view that a thinking thing could be a body?
2. How can Malebranche's occasionalism and doctrine of "seeing all things in God" be seen as highlighting positions proposed by Descartes and Spinoza?

Questions on Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics* 1-18 (Mar. 20)

1. How can seemingly evil human acts be consistent with God's will to produce good?
2. How are the predicates of a substance contained in it explicitly or virtually?
3. How does each thing express the whole universe uniquely in its "complete concept"?
4. Why don't the qualities of things (e.g., color, warmth) depend on extensional characteristics such as size, shape, or motion?
5. How can contingent truths about a person be certain without being necessary?
6. How can things be related to one another without acting upon one another?
7. Why does Leibniz say that God conserves the same force in nature but not the same motion?

Questions on Leibniz's *Discourse on Metaphysics* 19-37 (Mar. 22)

1. Why are final cause (purposive) explanations important in describing laws of nature?
2. What is the difference between knowing something (a) clearly, (b) distinctly, (c) adequately, and (d) intuitively?
3. How can Plato's theory of reminiscence be useful in understanding the soul's innate ability to express the nature, form, or essence of all things in the universe?

4. How can I be united to all other substances through God's operation and still express the state of other bodies only more or less clearly?
5. How do substantial forms, animal souls, and minds differ in the ways in which they "express" God vs. the world?

Questions on the Leibniz–Arnauld Correspondence I (Mar. 27)

1. What are Leibniz's replies to Arnauld's worry that God is not free to create as he sees fit if all that happens to creatures is implicit within their individual notions?
2. What is the difference between God's primitive decree of laws of the universe and his specific decrees about what actually exists?
3. What does Leibniz mean by "each individual substance expresses the whole universe from a certain point of view"?
4. How is Leibniz's theory of mind-body "concomitance" based on his belief that a subsequent state of mind or body happens spontaneously as the result of its preceding states?
5. Why are bodies (as "beings by aggregation") only improperly called substances?
6. How would a substantial form characterize a body as a "true corporeal substance" (vs. a true phenomenon)?

Questions on the Leibniz–Arnauld Correspondence II (Mar. 29)

1. How is Leibniz's account of mind-body interaction not a form of occasionalism?
2. "Where there are only beings by aggregation, there aren't any real beings": why?
3. "What is not truly *one* being is not truly *one being* either": why?
4. For Leibniz, what's wrong with using motion or extension (instead of force) to explain natural phenomena?

Essay Question on Leibniz's *Primary Truths & New System* (Sunday, Apr. 1)

For Leibniz, (1) there are no purely extrinsic denominations, and (2) perceptions of "external" things occur in virtue of the soul's own laws. How does this solve the mind-body problem?

Questions on the Leibniz–Bayle Exchange (Apr. 3)

1. How can the soul of an animal (e.g., a dog) have different "spontaneous" experiences in the absence of external causes?
2. How does Leibniz appeal to *petites perceptions* (small perceptions) to explain how the sequences of our experiences can still occur for a certain reason?

3. Why wouldn't I be aware beforehand of the experiences that define who I am if those experiences truly follow from my nature and are not caused from without?
4. How is extension an "order of coexistences" just as time is an "order of changes"?

Questions on Leibniz's *Principles of Nature and Grace* (Apr. 5)

1. How can a simple substance have a multiplicity of perceptions and still be simple?
2. How are the final causes regulating the appetitions and perceptions of substances in harmony with the efficient causes of the motions of bodies?
3. How are the perceptions of animals (brutes) different from the apperceptions of minds?
4. Why does Leibniz say that animals are ingenerable and imperishable?
5. How is the principle of sufficient reason the basis for Leibniz's claim that this is the best of possible worlds?
6. What does Leibniz mean by "every soul knows infinity"?
7. How can the rational soul not only mirror the universe but also be an image of God?
8. How does thinking of nature in terms of a kingdom of grace perfect it?

Questions on Leibniz's *Monadology* (Apr. 10)

1. Why can't bodies be monads?
2. What does Leibniz mean by saying that even though bodies are composed of metaphysical points, actual extension is merely phenomenal?
3. How are metaphysical points (i.e., monads) differentiated by their "entelechies"?
4. How does the appetite of a monad guide the monad's perceptions and apperceptions?
5. How can a monad be "windowless" and still be in harmonious correspondence with the changes in other monads?
6. How is the efficient causality found in bodily interactions subordinated to the final causality found in souls, creating a harmony between laws of motion and the moral kingdom of grace?

Questions on Locke: Ideas, Perception, Power, Freedom (Apr. 12)

1. What was Locke's intent in writing the *Essay concerning Human Understanding*?
2. What are the main topics of the four books of the *Essay*?
3. What does it mean to say that objects of sensation ("external material things") and objects of reflection ("operations of the mind") are *sources* of ideas?
4. Why would two persons exist in one man if "the soul always thinks"?

5. What is the Molyneux problem, and how does Locke respond to it?
6. How is our idea of power best understood by considering the activity of mind?
7. For Locke, what is liberty or freedom?
8. Why is a “free will” unintelligible—that is, why aren’t we free to will what we want?
9. Why does the greatest uneasiness determine the will, not the greatest good?
10. Are ideas of sensible qualities (e.g., colors) caused by figures/motion of insensible particles?

Essay Question on Locke’s *Essay* II.22-23 (Sunday, Apr. 15)

For Locke, how does the relation of the idea of a substance to its clearly-known sensible qualities allow for the possibility of thinking matter?

Questions on Locke: Personal Identity, General Ideas, Essences (Apr. 17)

1. How is a thing’s identity determined by the continuity of its existence or organization?
2. How are person (i.e., self), man, and immaterial substance (soul) different?
3. How does consciousness and not substance determine personal identity?
4. What does Locke mean by saying that *person* is a forensic term?
5. How do ideas become general (i.e., abstract) in virtue of being signified by names?
6. If species are merely abstract ideas, then what is the basis for how we group individuals?
7. What is the difference between real and nominal essences, and how are they the same in simple ideas and modes but different in substances?

Questions on Locke: Substance Names, Nature/Degrees of Knowledge (Apr. 19)

1. Why is the nominal essence of something (e.g., iron) merely an abstract idea?
2. Why can’t differences in species be natural sorts or kinds?
3. What is knowledge for Locke?
4. What are the four kinds of knowledge?
5. What is the difference between intuitive and demonstrative knowledge?
6. If knowledge is only about ideas, then how can we have “sensible knowledge” of things apart from us?

Questions on Locke: The Extent of Our Knowledge (Apr. 24)

1. How does Locke use his idea that God could “superadd” thought to matter to explain how the motion of matter produces sensations?
2. How can our ideas of secondary qualities depend on primary qualities (IV.3.11) if there is no discoverable connection between secondary and primary qualities (IV.3.12)?
3. How can morality be made as demonstrable as mathematics by specifying the definitions of moral terms such as *property* or *liberty*?
4. How are knowledge of my existence, God’s existence, and the existence of present sensible objects different?
5. Why can we never expect to develop *scientific certainty* about bodies?
6. What is Locke’s explanation of how minds and bodies affect one another?
7. How can we have *real knowledge* of things if we know them only by the intervention of ideas (IV.4.3-5)?
8. How can we have real knowledge of substances if their archetypes are independent of us?

Questions on Leibniz’s *New Essays* (Apr. 26)

1. How does Leibniz use our knowledge of universal necessary truths to prove innate ideas?
2. Why does Leibniz doubt Locke’s claims that we know only what we have perceived?
3. What evidence is there that the mind always thinks even though we are unaware of it?
4. How does the principle of the identity of indiscernibles undermine Locke’s view that minds are originally blank slates?
5. How does Leibniz resolve the Locke–Stillingfleet debate about thinking matter by pointing out that substances cannot be conceived apart from their activities?

Final Exam Questions

1. How are Leibniz and Locke similar yet different regarding how substances are related to their perceived qualities? (Start with DM 12 and E IV.3.13)
2. How are Leibniz’s and Locke’s accounts of mind-body interaction similar in spite of their different accounts of persons?