

Information on midterm exam Philosophy 1 Spring, 2006

The midterm exam takes place in class at the regular class time on Wednesday, May 3. This will be a closed-book, closed-note exam. No use of class materials or notes will be permitted at any time during the exam. We will supply paper; please do not bring blue books.

The exam will cover all course readings up to and including the reading for Monday, May 1. The exam will require you to answer some short-answer questions and a single essay question. On both the short-answer and essay portions of the exam, you will have some choice as to which questions to answer.

Short-answer questions

The short-answer questions will be drawn from the list below.

1. State one of the two arguments for the existence of God advanced by Descartes in Meditation 3.
2. State Descartes's argument for the existence of God in Meditation 5.
3. Descartes uses an example involving a piece of wax in Meditation 2. What is the argument?
4. What is Molinism (the view that is associated with the theologian de Molina)?
5. In "The Argument from Design" Robert Hambourger presents what he asserts is an improved version of the argument from design (better than the argument by analogy that Paley gives). State the basic argument Hambourger advances and endorses.
6. In "Evil for Freedom's Sake?" David Lewis describes several strategies that (it has been thought, rightly or wrongly) a perfectly benevolent, all-powerful, and omniscient God might have employed in order to prevent any of His creatures from ever perpetrating significantly harmful evil-doing. Describe any two of these strategies.
7. According to Grunbaum, what serious reason, worthy of our consideration, for rejecting the claim that the world is created and sustained by a God with the traditional attributes does Freud advance?
8. In Meditation 6, Descartes claims to establish the real distinction between mind and body. What is this real distinction between mind and body and how does Descartes argue for it?
9. In the reading labeled "The Wager" Pascal poses a decision problem and advances a solution to it. What is the decision problem and what is his proposed solution?
10. State Robert Adams's distinction between a theoretical argument and a practical argument concerning the claim that God exists. Summarize one practical argument concerning the claim that God exists that he advances.
11. In the Discourse on Method Descartes states that he found all of the subjects that he learned at school intellectually unsatisfactory except mathematics. What according to Descartes is so specially satisfactory about mathematics, such that it is suited for the role of foundation for knowledge?

12. In “Kierkegaard’s Arguments against Objective Reasoning in Religion,” Robert Adams finds three arguments in Kierkegaard’s writings against reasoning objectively to provide a justification for religious faith. Adams argues that one of these three arguments is a bad argument, that the remaining two are “not so easily disposed of,” but that they proceed from a conception of religious faith that he finds problematic. State any one of these remaining arguments and indicate what Adams finds problematic about it.

13. At the beginning of Meditation 6, Descartes writes, “It remains for me to consider whether material things exist.” What resolution of this issue does Meditation 6 propose? What argument does Descartes offer in support of the view he takes of this issue in Meditation 6?

14. According to Kierkegaard, what is the difference between an individual being related to the Christian faith objectively and subjectively?

15. According to Robert Adams, if God did not exist, or did not love us, would nothing be morally right or wrong according to the Divine command theory of moral obligation (moral rightness and wrongness)? Why or why not?

16. In “Evil for Freedom’s Sake?” David Lewis announces that his aim is not to debunk free-will theodicy but rather to show the pertinent arguments end in deadlock. What exactly is the “deadlock” position reached at the end of his essay? What arguments according to him offset each other so that no decisive winning position emerges?

Essay questions

The essay questions will be drawn from the list below. On the actual exam, two questions will be posed, and you will be asked to answer one of them.

1. In the course reading labeled “Subjectivity is Truth” Soren Kierkegaard writes, “Now the problem is to calculate on which side there is the most truth: either the side of one who seeks the true God objectively and pursues the approximate truth of the God-idea or the side of one who is driven by infinite concern for his relationship to God.” According to Kierkegaard the strategy of seeking the true God objectively is misguided. What does he mean by this claim? What considerations does he advance to support it? Defend or criticize his position.

2. Does Descartes reason in a circle in that vitiates his reasoning in the argument from Meditation 3 through Meditation 5? Explain the “Cartesian circle” objection and either defend the objection against Descartes or defend Descartes against the objection.

3. Does Descartes succeed in his overall aim of establishing certainly true knowledge in the Meditations? Why or why not? Focus your discussion on the “Cogito” or “I am thinking” argument of Meditation 2 and the argument for God’s existence in Meditation 3.

4. What is the method of doubt that Descartes proposes to follow in Meditation 1? What according to Descartes is the state of his knowledge at the end of Meditation 1? What arguments lead him to this state? Is Descartes making some mistake in supposing it makes sense to extend doubt as widely as he claims? For example, can you really doubt that you have two hands in front of your face when, as you think, you place two hands in front of your normally sighted unmasked eyes in clear daylight? Why or why not?