

Phil. 126 3/22/21

Course Papers: Info/Topics

Papers due: April 8, 5pm

Directions: Write a 1,400–2,100 word (about 4-6 pages, typed, double-spaced) paper on one of the topics listed below. Papers are due April 8, by 5pm. Successful papers will clearly explain the issues involved and the key argumentative moves made in the readings and/or discussed in class and sections, but will focus on advancing the discussion/argument in significant ways with new considerations or lines of argument of your own. (It is possible, even if not likely, that an updated version of this sheet with an added topic or two, will be issued in the next few days.)

1. Explain and critically assess Descartes's dream argument. What is he trying to show? Does he succeed? Evaluate the argument in light of what you take to be the most important potential challenge(s) to it.

2. Explain and critically assess the argument for God's existence that Descartes advances in Meditation Three, whose main premise is that Descartes has an idea of God.

3. Those who answered question 3 on the midterm should make sure there is not too much overlap in what they write between the two exercises if they choose this topic.

Explain and critically compare Descartes's and Leibniz's views on the relation between mind and body, making sure to explain, on each philosopher's view, why there is a correspondence between what happens in the mind and what happens in the body. Which is the more defensible view? Explain.

4. Those who answered question 3 on the midterm should not choose this topic.

Critically assess Leibniz's account of the relation between mind and body and his opinion that his account of this relation is better than interactionism and occasionalism.

5. Explain and critically compare Descartes's and Locke's views on secondary qualities, making sure to explain both where the two philosophers agree and where they disagree. Which is the more defensible view? Defend your answer.

6. Those who answered question 4a on the midterm should make sure there is not too much overlap in what they write between the two exercises if they choose this topic. On

Leibniz's views, as expounded in our passage H, there could have been a mind (whether or not it would have been you) that had all the same perceptions that you are having and have had, even though it was the only mind in the world, other than God. And despite Leibniz's apparent assurance to the contrary (in H), it seems that such a mind would be massively deceived about the nature of the world it inhabited. Critically discuss the questions: On Leibniz's views, what grounds do you have for thinking that you are not such a massively deceived mind? Granting Leibniz the existence of a perfect God, are these (otherwise) good grounds? Does Leibniz's view that there could have been such minds with all the same perceptions as each of us lead to problematic skepticism?

7. What does it take for an action to be freely performed, on Leibniz's views? How does Leibniz think we can ever act freely, if our actions are just the working out of what was contained in our individual concepts all along? Critically evaluate Leibniz's account of free action in the light of what you take to be strongest objections to it.

8. Those who answered question 1 on the midterm should not choose this topic.

Critically assess Descartes's argument in Meditation Six from the existence of God to the existence of "corporeal things." (Don't assess Descartes's proof of the existence of God: We are granting Descartes that, at least for the sake of argument, here.) In the course of your evaluation, explain what seems to you to be the most important potential objection to that argument and evaluate the argument in light of that objection. (Again, since we're granting the Descartes his proof of God, don't object to that proof.) Does the argument succeed (supposing that God's existence has been proved)? Explain and defend your answer.

9. Those who answered question 2 on the midterm should not choose this topic. Many have thought the problem of the "Cartesian Circle" infects Descartes's procedure in the Meditations. Explain and defend what you think is the most promising way of trying to understand Descartes such that he is not guilty of viciously circular reasoning. In the final analysis, do you think Descartes is guilty of viciously circular reasoning, or not? Explain and defend your answer.