

Study Guide: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz (Spring 2020)

You can use the primary texts when writing this exam. Please cite these texts when attributing claims to the various philosophers. You may also use an 8 ½ x 11 inch sheet of notes.

I will ask you to write a developed essay on two of the following comparative questions (I'll let you know which two at the time of the exam)

Compare our three philosophers' account of ... **substance**, ... a **physical object** (e.g., a stone, your left elbow), ... **perception and knowledge**, ... **error and truth**, ... **human beings** and the possibility of human freedom, ... **causality** and the relationship between mind and body, ... **God**.

[You should be able to write a brief paragraph on each of the following. I will expect you to answer five of the following, from a set of choices.]

In what sense are Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz “rationalists”?

In what sense was Descartes' philosophy “modern”? In what sense was Spinoza's?

What is the difference between mechanical and teleological explanations? What is the significance of this distinction?

What is the difference between primary and secondary qualities? How does Descartes distinguish these, and why is their difference important?

How does Descartes justify his “clear and distinct ideas” criterion?

Describe and evaluate Descartes' arguments for God's existence.

Why did Descartes believe in an evil demon, and how does this belief fit into his larger project?

What is Descartes' methodological doubt? Why did he use it? What did he discover with it?

How does Descartes explain error? Why is such an explanation important?

Explain and evaluate Spinoza's argument that only *one substance* exists. What else exists?

Describe and evaluate Spinoza's rejection of final causation.

Does Spinoza's God act freely? What does it mean to act freely, in Spinoza's system?

What is Leibniz's account of individual substances? What is the relation between an individual and God?

Why does Leibniz believe that all propositions are analytic? What does this belief amount to?

How does Leibniz characterize the difference between contingent and necessary truths?

What is the difference between transeunt and immanent causation?

What is the principle of sufficient reason? How does Leibniz make use of this principle?

What does Leibniz mean by “pre-established harmony” and what role does it play in his philosophy?