

A.5.1 TEST 2 – Descartes – Study Guide

The first examination will take place on Wednesday, February 25., at the regular time and place for class. It is closed books, closed notes.

What the examination will be looking like

The examination will consist in

1. 3 definitions (1 point each)
2. 1 quotation explanation (2 points)
3. 5 short questions (5 points each)

The total will be on 30 points, and will count for 5% of your final grade for the course.

The definitions and questions will be chosen out of the list below.

- The definitions are given in the course notes. You should give an *example* in order to show that you understand the definition. To get these three points, you just have to learn and understand the definitions in the course notes...

- The questions are short and simple. Your answer should share both qualities. That said, you should aim at explaining yourself fully. Concretely, you should not expect to be able to answer with just one sentence. More than one paragraph, on the other hand, is probably too much. Always define the technical terms you use. Always provide examples to illustrate your point.

The questions are meant to check your knowledge of the material covered in class. You are not asked to know more than what was said in class and what is in the course notes.

As you may notice, the questions are largely inspired from, if not identical to, the study questions. This means that a good way for you to work is to (1) prepare the study questions before class; and (2) revise your answers after class. This way, your answers will be ready for revision for the following exam.

The quotation explanation consists in the following:

- I will choose a passage from the readings
- You will have to say:
 1. From which text it is taken (in the case of Descartes for example, you need to tell me which from which meditation it is taken);
 2. What is the point that the author is trying to make (which claim does he want to argue for);
 3. What is his argument for it (presumably, this involves appealing to the context of the passage given: the passage alone may not contain all the elements you need to explain what's going on).

Don't go into too much detail, but be precise. You should be able to answer with one sentence for each of the above.

Definitions and Questions

Definitions – Make sure to give examples:

1. knowledge
2. epistemology
3. foundationalism
4. metaphysics
5. rationalism
6. empiricism

Short Questions :

1. What are the main aims (explicit and implicit) of Descartes' *Meditations*?
2. Explain why Descartes decides to reject as false “*all* the opinions which [he] had formerly accepted” (my emphasis) even if he does not know for sure that they are all false.
3. What is the dream argument? what kind of belief does this argument allow Descartes to reject as false?

4. What is the evil genius argument? what kind of belief does this argument allow Descartes to reject as false? Why was the dream argument not enough to reject this kind of belief?
5. What is the main aim of the second meditation?
6. Explain how, according to Descartes in the Second Meditation, the proposition "I think I exist" resists the argument of the evil genius.
7. Explain how Descartes is lead to the conclusion that he is "a thing which thinks". Explain in what sense and to what extent this conclusion can be challenged.
8. Concerning the discussion of the piece of wax: what is the conclusion to which this discussion leads? Reconstruct Descartes' argument for this claim.
9. What is the general rule for finding the truth that Descartes accept in the 3rd Meditation? How does he argue for the validity of such a rule?
10. Why does Descartes still need to prove the existence of God?
11. Explain how Descartes argues for the existence of God on the basis of the study of the various kinds of ideas we have, and of the various kinds of reality that these ideas have.
12. Explain Descartes' version of the Cosmological argument. Give one way in which it can be challenged.
13. Explain why it is essential for Descartes to explain the possibility for us to make mistakes, even concerning mathematics and logic.
14. What is the cause of our errors for Descartes? Explain how this theory of error makes it possible for Descartes to consistently hold that: (1) we can make mistakes; and (2) God is not a deceiver.
15. What is the sure method for finding the truth according to Descartes in the 4th meditation?
16. In what sense can Descartes say that indifference is the lowest state of freedom?
17. How does Descartes restore the truth of mathematical notions in the 5th Meditation?

18. Explain Descartes' version of the Ontological Argument. Explain one way in which it can be challenged.
19. Explain what the Cartesian Circle is. Give one way out of it.
20. What is the main aim of the 6th meditation?
21. How does the fact that we have a faculty of imagination indicate that our body exists?
22. What is Descartes' argument for his claim that the body is distinct from the mind? How do my body and my mind relate to each other according to Descartes? Do you find Descartes convincing on this point? Why / Why not?
23. Descartes seems to tell us that we are "taught by nature" that external bodies exist. In the first Meditation, however, Descartes had rejected the "teaching of nature" as reliable? What were his reasons for rejecting them? Why does he think he can discard these reasons now?