

# Exam Questions World Philosophies: Modern Europe

## 2022-2023

### Midterm Exam

*Maximum word count is 200 words per question.*

#### Question 1:

In his *Pensées*, Pascal writes that we are lost between two infinities. He says: “Whenever we think we can cling firmly to a fixed point, it alters and leaves us behind, and if we follow it, it slips from our grasp, slides away in eternal escape.” Explain how his view differs from that of Descartes. Also indicate what his 'wager' entails and whether it provides a way out of his 'being lost'.

#### Question 2:

Descartes writes in his second Meditation: “But how do I know that there is not something different from all those things I have just listed, about which there is not the slightest room for doubt?” After an exercise in systematic doubt, Descartes does indeed find a fixed point about which he can be certain no matter what. Where does he find this fixed point and why does he think it cannot be doubted? Reconstruct his argument.

#### Question 3:

Explain how Spinoza's philosophy of expression overcomes the mind-body dualism that he inherited from Descartes. Also indicate how, even though everything is part of one and the same substance, he explains the limited nature of human experience that (more often than not) results in inadequate ideas.

#### Question 4:

Anne Viscountess Conway writes the following in her treatise *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, “Now, I ask, whether the species of horse possesses such infinite perfection that a horse can always become better and better to infinity, yet always remain a horse?” How does she answer this question? Also indicate what this says about the mutability of creatures. Explain your answer.

### Final Exam

*Maximum word count is 300 words per question.*

#### Question 1:

In his "Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who Can See," Dennis Diderot addresses one of the famous problems in early modern philosophy, known as 'Molyneux's problem'. He has a different

take on this problem than predecessors like John Locke. This becomes clear at various moments, for instance here:

"One of us decided to ask our blind man whether he would like to have eyes. He replied, 'If I wasn't so curious. I'd just as well have long arms, as it seems to me that my hands could teach me more about what's happening on the moon than your eyes or telescopes can, and besides, eyes stop seeing well before hands stop touching. It would be just as good to improve the organ I already have, as to grant me the one I lack.'" (Diderot, "Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who Can See", 176; p. 9 of the .pdf of week 11)

Explain Diderot's response to Molyneux's problem and indicate in which sense it differs from the response of his predecessors. Make sure you also address Diderot's suggestion that there is a metaphysics and a morality of the blind.

### **Question 2:**

What is the most interesting thing you've learned in the History of Modern Philosophy/Modern Europe course? Explain in some detail:

1. what it is that interests you (refer to concrete texts from either the first or the second block; make sure you explain at least one of the main ideas referred to properly);
2. why you think it is interesting.

Make sure you articulate this precisely and carefully, and add some depth to it. Use at least one quote (this is not included in the word count).

### **Question 3:**

In the 'Conclusion of the Transcendental Aesthetic' of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason the following is stated:

"Here we now have one of the required pieces for the solution of the general problem of transcendental philosophy - how are synthetic a priori propositions possible? - namely pure a priori intuitions, space and time..." (Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 182/ B73; p. 15 of the .pdf of week 13)

Explain what Kant means by 'synthetic a priori propositions' and how they relate to: (a) the pure forms of intuition (space and time) and (b) the pure categories of the understanding. Make sure you also make mention of the 'conditions of possible experience'.

### **Question 4:**

At the beginning of his correspondence with Antoine Arnauld, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz writes the following:

"Moreover, the proposition that was the occasion of this whole discussion is very important and deserves to be established firmly. For it follows that every individual substance expresses the universe completely; in its manner, and under a certain relation, or, so to speak, on the basis of the point of view from which it looks at it;" (Letter 14, "Leibniz to Arnauld," 14 July 1686; p. 13 of the .pdf of week 7)

Explain in clear and precise sentences what Leibniz means when he says that "every individual substance expresses the universe completely". Make sure you address at least the following themes: (a) the idea of 'inclusion'; (b) the complete concept; (c) the notion 'point of view'.