

PAPER ASSIGNMENTS

For each assignment, write a five to eight page paper (double-spaced, 1" margins, other standard format items). Your essay should integrate passages from the texts referred to with your own account of the meaning and significance of these passages. Try to make your essay a coherent whole, with a clear, interesting thesis and argument. Any material you cite, whether from primary or secondary sources, needs to be put in quotes and footnoted. This is especially important with any secondary material you might use. Also, in those cases where you can choose a topic, be sure that you indicate on the front page of your essay which question you have chosen to answer. You MUST write on Descartes; other than that, you need to write on three of the other five philosophers. The deadlines for each paper are given with the assignment.

Descartes (due Thurs., Feb. 21):

In the First Meditation Descartes lays out two distinct reasons for skepticism about the senses, one based on the Dreaming Argument and the other on the Evil Deceiver Argument. Explain and evaluate one of these arguments, and explain and evaluate as well Descartes' response to it in the body of the *Meditations*. In your judgment, does Descartes succeed in providing foundations for knowledge using "philosophy rather than theology"?

Spinoza (Due Thurs., March 3):

In Part I of the *Ethics* Spinoza denies (Prop. 32) that free will can be attributed to God, and says (Prop. 33) that "things could not have been produced by God in any other way or in any other order than is the case." Discuss the role this view about God's nature plays in Spinoza's argument in Part I. In particular, explain how Spinoza's denial of God's free will arises from his emphasis on God's rationality, and show how it supports his rejection of natural teleology in the Appendix. In your view, is Spinoza's God recognizably similar to the God of theism, or is his view to be understood as a radical challenge to theism?

Leibniz (Due Thurs., March 20) :

In Section 9 of the *Discourse on Metaphysics* Leibniz says that "each singular substance expresses the whole universe in its own way." (p. 188) Explain what this means, and how it is supposed to follow from the account of substance in Section 8, and ultimately from the rejection of voluntarism in Section 2. Explain also the consequences of this view for Leibniz's account of the mind-body relation. Does Leibniz' view succeed in avoiding the problems associated with Descartes' view? Why or why not?

Berkeley (Due Thurs., April 3):

Explain what Berkeley means by the terms “immediate perception” and “material substance.” Explain as well his argument in the First Dialogue that material substance is not immediately perceived. Are you convinced by his claim that there is no empirical evidence for the existence of material substance? Why or why not?

Hume (Due Thurs., April 17):

In Section 12 of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume criticizes the “excessive” skepticism of Descartes, and contrasts it with his own “mitigated” skepticism. Explain this criticism, and how Hume’s naturalism contributes to his response to Descartes. Explain also how the analysis of causation in Sections 4 - 7 is supposed to support Hume’s mitigated skepticism. Does Hume manage to offer a convincing retort to Descartes’ argument in Med. 1? Why or why not?

Kant (Due Tues., May 13):

One of the most important principles of Kant’s transcendental idealism is that claim (p. 598) that “the subjective laws, under which alone an empirical cognition of things is possible, are also valid for these things as objects of possible experience.” Explain what Kant means by this, and use it to explain his argument *either* for the claim, in the First Part of the *Prolegomena*, that space and time are pure forms of intuition, or the argument, in the Second Part, for the objective validity of the categories.