

Final Exam

PART I - Please answer four of the following five questions:

1. In the Second Meditation, we read Descartes' famous description of a piece of wax (p.400). What, in your own words, is Descartes trying to demonstrate with this example?

Descartes is describing doubt by demonstrating how the wax undergoes the physical changes when it is brought next to heat, but yet still remain to be the same wax as before. In the beginning when the wax was taken from the hive, it contained the physical properties of odor from the flowers, color, shape, and size, which are apparent. One could handle it easily since it was cold and hard. However, as he takes the wax next to the fire, the heat changes the physical characteristics of the wax. The wax is no longer easily handled, it is no longer in a solid mode, it has lost its texture, odor, color, and shape. Yet, the mind still knows the remaining substance as the wax, even though the senses tell otherwise. A better example would perhaps be watching people pass by on the streets. The mind perceives those figures to be of men, and it comes to a conclusion that they are in-fact men. However, those figures could be robots or mechanical machines, as Descartes puts it. In a way the senses are lying to the mind and the result is an error, but an error which the mind accepts because of the idea or image passed to it by the senses.

2. Descartes' method of doubt led him to a point where he can affirm only ideas that are "simply modes of thought," completely detached from anything outside of his own thought. How does Descartes attempt to "reattach," or "bridge", these subjective ideas to an objective reality?

Descartes builds the bridge between the subjective ideas and the objective reality by saying that matter resolves around an idea of extension and duration, both of which are clear and distinct ideas. Descartes attempts to break out of the isolation of the mind by grounding clear and distinct ideas necessity, to bridge the certainty of ideas as modes of thought and the truth of their claims. Ideas are images, and as images, they must have a cause, and this cause must be greater or equal to the actual reality than the idea as an actual mode of thought. Descartes says, "I think, therefore I am," meaning that the mind is working and it is thinking, therefore it is clear that the mind exists. The idea of ideas to Descartes is native, meaning that it is already within the mind, and since they are within the mind, and that we have proved that the mind exists, it follows that the ideas also exist. Descartes also mentions that God would not deceive man as of putting ideas in his head and for them, the ideas, to be false, therefore they do exist in the objective world.

3. According to Hume, all claims regarding "matter of fact" are merely probable. Why?

Hume believes that all reasoning concerning matters of fact is founded on relations of cause and effect. He believes that all reasoning from matters of fact stems from experience, or a posteriori. The notion of cause and effect is completely arbitrary. In

other words, if A does not lead to B, this would not imply a contradiction. Cause and effect are arbitrary, they are not a priori. An example: The sun, by definition, does not have to rise in the morning. Hume is claiming that nature prevails over our limited reasoning, knowledge of the worlds, of matters of fact, is not dependent on our reasoning and understanding, rather, our knowledge is compelled through our beliefs, which are grounded in our emotions, or feelings.

5. According to Kierkegaard, the story of Abraham reflects a "teleological suspension of the ethical." Explain this claim.

Kierkegaard starts out by indicating that in Christianity, the single individual is higher than the universal, which is the ethical, and it is related directly to the absolute. The ethical applies to humanity as a whole, universal. However, man is related to the absolute (God) as a single individual and answerable to him. Just as the absolute is above the universal (the ethical), so is the individual in relation to the absolute above the universal. The story of Abraham is a "teleological suspension of the ethical", and this refers to the idea of leap of faith, which is the idea that even though reason may tell you something is false, you chose to believe in it and ignore the facts. Concerning the ethical, Abraham's duty to Isaac is fatherly love. The individual is higher than this universal, and thus concerning the religious, man's duty is related to the absolute, that is to God, who posited (taking for granted without prove) the ethical. Kierkegaard draws a startling conclusion, when God commanded Abraham to slay his son, the ethical actually became a temptation for him. Abraham could have yielded to the ethical without engaging his thought, will or his heart, but man cannot servilely (slavishly) obey the universal when the absolute, supreme, contravenes it. Abraham simply has the choice of obedience or disobedience, he chooses to believe that the giver of the ethical will sustain him within the breach of the ethical.

PART II – Please answer all three parts of the following question:

1. (a) According to Descartes, what are you? (b) According to Hume, what are you? And, (c) according to Kant, what are you?

(A) Descartes believed that we are a union of two opposites, the mind and the body, and that the body is essentially just a host for the mind. He believed that all of our ideas already do exist in our minds, and that we don't acquire anything new through our life span. He believed that the soul has in it all of the ideas you will ever have. Kind of like the same idea Plato had.

(B) To Hume we are an interactive machine, we learn by doing and experience. He believed that ideas are found by experience, and that our ideas don't come into being without our senses. He believes that we have a built-in way for classifying information, and that we can obtain new ways for classifying these information. Different people will experience things differently since the infrastructure of the mind is different for each individual, and therefore the information taken in by the senses will cause the individual to interpret differently based on the logic which is formed by the individuals brain. Hume believes that the soul is formed, in a sense, from living unlike Kant and Descartes.

(C) Kant believes that the mind takes a more active role, for him we are ideas, and our transcendental (rising above common thought or ideas) self creates an idea of

our physical self. It does this because the mind routinely and passionately is seeking knowledge using the theories that it has at its disposal to describe the self. He disagrees with Descartes on the fact that we take in perceptions and interpret them with our ideas to derive at a final opinion. And disagrees with Hume on the notion that we get our ideas from the external world and than we form oversimplifications from them. Both of these beliefs share the fact that the mind is thought as a receptacle.