

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

MA PHILOSOPHY
for Internal Students

RATIONALISTS

Friday 17th September 1999
10.00 – 13.00

Answer THREE questions

1. What features of a philosopher's thought make it appropriate to describe him as a rationalist? Discuss this with reference to at least TWO of Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche and Leibniz.
2. What is the purpose of Descartes' discussion of the block of wax in Meditation II?
3. "It does not seem to me that the human mind is capable of conceiving at the same time the distinction and the union between the soul and the body, because for this it is necessary to conceive them as a single thing, and at the same time as two things..."(Descartes to Princess Elizabeth, 28 June 1643). Discuss.
4. Would a consistent application of Descartes' method of doubt result in distrust of all our mental faculties and hence in total paralysis of thought?
5. Is Descartes' claim that God is no deceiver compatible with his view of the nature of eternal truths?
6. "Only a mathematical amateur such as Spinoza would have attempted to set out a metaphysical system using a formal apparatus borrowed from Euclidean geometry". Discuss.
7. Give a critical discussion of Spinoza's account of the relation between the human mind and the human body.
8. Does Spinoza show convincingly that "except God no substance can be or be conceived" (Ethics, Bk. I prop. xiv)?
9. Can Spinoza reconcile his claim that individuals strive to persevere in their being with the existence

of
self-destructive behaviour such as suicide?

10. “The best parts of Leibniz's philosophy are the most abstract, and the worst those which most nearly concern human life” (Russell). Discuss.

11. Does Leibniz's account of truth leave any room for contingent as well as necessary propositions?

12. Why does Leibniz speak of monads as being “windowless”? How good are his reasons for doing so?

13. Does Leibniz deny the reality of relations?

END OF PAPER