



Modern philosophy: Spinoza, Leibniz and Kant [PY3125] (Prerequisite: PY1065)

Introductory reading

Hamlyn, D.W. A History of Western Philosophy. (Viking, 1987).

Cottingham, J. The Rationalists. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Introductory books on individual philosophers

Curley, E.M. Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics. (Princeton University Press, 1988).

Ross, G. MacDonald. Leibniz. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

Scruton, R. Kant. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Sample examination questions

1. In what sense did Spinoza believe that everything that happens, happens by necessity?
2. Can Spinoza consistently maintain that Nature is a substance?
3. What mode of extension corresponds to my idea of your body? What importance would Spinoza attach to this question?
4. 'An affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it.' What does Spinoza mean by this, and is it true?
5. 'There is nothing positive in ideas on account of which they are called false.' (Ethics II, 32.) How, then, does Spinoza account for human error?
6. According to Leibniz's metaphysics, should an apple tree be thought of as a monad, an aggregate of monads, a well-founded phenomenon, or none of these?
7. Why does Leibniz say that monads are 'windowless'?
8. Critically discuss the account Leibniz gives of truth.
9. Does Leibniz give an unambiguous account of the relation of mind and body?
10. 'There is nothing in the understanding which does not come from the senses, except the understanding itself.' (Leibniz) What is the relevance of this claim to the dispute about innate ideas?
11. How plausible are Kant's conceptions of space and time?
12. Why does Kant argue that there must be 'pure concepts of the understanding'?

13. Is Kant's view of 'things-in-themselves' plausible?
14. What is the 'transcendental unity of apperception', and what is its importance in Kant's doctrine?
15. What does Kant find objectionable about speculative metaphysics?