

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY  
METAPHYSICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY COMPREHENSIVE EXAM  
PERMANENT QUESTIONS**

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Note: the exam will consist of three questions from each of the following sections, of which the examinee must answer one from each section. (Three answers total.)

**ANCIENT & MEDIEVAL**

1. Both Plato and Aristotle have a great deal to say about form (*eidos*). Describe their respective views of form, including the arguments they give for their positions, and discuss what you see as the strengths and weaknesses of each view.
2. What are the objects of knowledge for Plato and Aristotle? How does each philosopher argue for his position? What are the strengths and weaknesses of their views?
3. According to Aristotle, in what ways and for what reasons should form, matter, and their composite be regarded as substance? What roles do his various writings play in articulating his views? What difficulties do these views raise?
4. The Hellenistic schools are often said to have regarded philosophy as a form of therapy for the soul. Discuss the accuracy of this claim with regard to any three of the following: Stoicism, Epicureanism, Skepticism, and Neoplatonism. Of the systems you discuss, does any provide an adequate form of therapy? What, indeed, do you think such “therapy” ought to look like?
5. Augustine is sometimes said to have “discovered” the will. Explain and evaluate this claim by comparing his account of human action to those of any two of the following: Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and the Stoics. Of the authors you discuss, which do you think has the more defensible account, and why?
6. Describe some major ways in which the metaphysics and natural theology of Aquinas differ from those of Aristotle. Which of them do you think has the stronger view, and why?
7. Describe and evaluate the arguments for the existence of God (or, if the author provides more than one such argument, the one you consider strongest) given by Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas.
8. Are universals real? Describe and evaluate the positions taken on this question by Boethius, Abelard, and Ockham.

**17<sup>TH</sup>-19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES**

9. Does Descartes have an adequate response to skepticism? If not, what sort of answer should one give? Discuss with reference to Descartes and at least two of his successors.
10. Descartes claims that the mind and body are (a) substances, and (b) really distinct. Describe his argument and how his position is critiqued by at least two of his successors. What conclusions do you draw from this debate?
11. Descartes (*Meditations* 4) and Locke (*Essay*, Book IV) hold that one should proportion the degree of one’s assent to a proposition to the amount of evidence or rational proof that one can furnish in its support. Are they right? Discuss the arguments that can be given for and against this view, and your own resolution.

12. How can we tell whether our “representations” actually represent anything? Discuss with reference to Locke’s causal theory of perception and Berkeley’s immaterialist response.

13. According to Leibniz, everything is necessary; according to Hume, everything is contingent. Critically evaluate the arguments of each philosopher for his view, and explain to what extent (if at all) you find their views compelling.

14. In the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Hume defines a cause as “an object, followed by another, and where all the objects followed by the first are followed by objects similar to the second. Or in other words where, if the first object had not been, the second had never existed.” Focusing on this passage, describe and critically evaluate Hume’s view of causation. Does his paraphrase “or in other words . . .” simplify or complicate the issues? Finally, how does Kant respond to the Humean view, and which of them do you believe is more nearly correct?

15. How can a person be self-identical over time? Critically discuss the views of Locke, Hume, and Kant. What are your own conclusions on this subject?

16. The purpose of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to discover the limits of reason so that we might know what kind of knowledge is possible. Explain how this is achieved in successive stages through the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” the “Transcendental Analytic,” and the “Transcendental Dialectic.” To what extent do you find this approach to the limits of reason successful?

## PLATO TO NIETZSCHE

17. What is substance? Describe and critically evaluate the views of any three of the following, including at least one from the ancient/medieval and one from the modern period: Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Locke, Spinoza, Berkeley, and Kant. Which of them do you think has the most tenable view, and why?

18. What is the difference between Platonic dualism and Cartesian dualism? Is either view tenable?

19. Compare and contrast Kant’s realm of the noumenal and Plato’s realm of the Forms. What are the arguments of each author for the existence of these “realms”? What are the best objections that can be raised against their views, and what are your own conclusions?

20. Critically compare the views of the first principle (known variously as the One, God, or the Absolute) of any three of the following: Aristotle, Plotinus, Spinoza, and Hegel. Do you find any of these views compelling? Why or why not?

21. Provide a Nietzschean critique of any two philosophers on the reading list, one from the ancient/medieval and one from the modern period. Do you think the critiques are valid? What, if anything, can we learn from Nietzsche as a critic of previous philosophy?

22. What is an idea, and what are the limitations on what ideas we can have? Discuss this issue with reference to at least three philosophers from the reading list, including at least one from each period.

23. Human freedom is often seen as incompatible with (a) divine foreknowledge, and (b) the determinism that seems to exist in the physical world. Drawing on arguments from at least three philosophers on the reading list (not all from the same period), and giving attention to both of these challenges, argue for or against the existence of human freedom.

24. How has the effort to refute skepticism changed throughout the history of philosophy? To what extent has this effort been successful? Discuss with reference to the views of at least three philosophers, including at least one from the ancient/medieval and one from the modern period.

25. "All metaphysics is nonsense." Critically evaluate this claim with respect to the western philosophical tradition.