

SCI-Arc
Spring 2019
Graham Harman & Daniel Tovar
Philosophy 1 Essay Topics

Instructions:

1200 words, 12pt Times New Roman font, double-spaced, 1 inch margins

Choose one prompt below to address. Your essay should begin with the following information:

First & last names

Course & year

Essay prompt written out in full (including the number)

Due: April 3, hard copy, to be turned in at the start of class and soft copy, to be submitted online. I will provide a link as the due date approaches.

Secondary sources:

[Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) — See for general overviews

[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) — See for detailed, scholarly discussions

It is perfectly acceptable to write on the same philosopher that you presented on. Each prompt should be answered by returning to and carefully re-reading the text. You are free to consult the primary text from which a reading selection was taken, but you are **highly discouraged** from consulting any other material. If you need clarification, feel free to search the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy or the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. **Note that whatever you look at, you *must* cite. Even if you don't cite it in the essay itself, then at least include it on the works cited page. Do not plagiarize. Writing a bad paper that nonetheless passes, or even one that doesn't pass, is never worth the risk of plagiarizing.**

Note about style & citing primary sources: you are required to cite all of your sources, including the primary text that your chosen prompt directs you to write on. Thus, if you are writing on Plato, you must cite the Plato excerpt in *Reality* when necessary (or, if you're relying on the primary source excerpted in *Reality*, that primary source). If you use sources other than *Reality* (or the respective primary text), you must also include a works cited page. The citations and works cited page should follow an American English style guide. This can be MLA, APA, or Chicago. I don't care which. I just care that it follows *some* style guide.

Essay Prompts

Ancient

1. What is the divided line analogy and what is the allegory of the cave? How do they relate and/or differ from each other?
2. Aristotle gives an account of what (primary and secondary) substance is by distinguishing between that which is “said of” (or “predicated of” as it is translated in the *Reality* text) a subject and that which is “present in” a subject. Explain what a substance is for Aristotle using and explaining this said of/present in distinction. Pay special attention to the implication that certain predicates’ existence is dependent upon substance. (Note: an alternative and somewhat clearer translation of this text can be found here: <https://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/520/Cats1-5.pdf>. In particular, this translation uses the customary “said of”/“present in” translations. The excerpt we have in *Reality* starts at Chapter 5 and goes until the end of the PDF.)
3. Compare and contrast Plato and Aristotle’s views on substance.

Ancient & Medieval

4. What is Plato’s account of the forms and what biblical content does Augustine add to Plato’s theory in the reading that we did?
5. What is Aquinas’s criticism of Aristotle with respect to existence? What explains existence, according to Aquinas?

Rationalists

6. Descartes: “I think, therefore I am” is the first piece of genuine knowledge that Descartes hits upon. How does Descartes arrive here? In order to have knowledge beyond this, Descartes thinks that we need God. What is his argument for the existence of God? Is it a good argument? Why or why not?
7. Spinoza: At the beginning of the excerpt from the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza states that “. . . in order to express our views more clearly, we shall premise the four following propositions.” He then lists those four propositions and in the pages that follow gives arguments for each one. Choose one proposition and explain in your own words how Spinoza argues for it.
8. In *Monadology* 2, Leibniz writes, “...there must be simple substances, since there are composites; for the composite is nothing more than a collection, or *aggregate*, of simples.” What, according to Spinoza, is a substance? Explain why must this substance must be simple (don’t forget to explain what it means for something to be simple).
9. In *Monadology* 17, Leibniz argues that “perception . . . is inexplicable in terms of mechanical reasons . . .” Discuss Leibniz argument here, putting it into your own words.

Empiricists

10. Locke: What does Locke think substance is? How does he come to this conclusion?

11. Berkeley: What is the only kind of substance, according to Berkeley? Why does he think this? What does he think primary qualities such as extension, rest, figure, motion, solidity, and number are?

12. Hume: Give Hume's skeptical argument. Explain how this relates to natural laws like Newton's law of gravity and/or one of his laws of motion (for example: $\text{force} = \text{mass} * \text{acceleration}$)

Kant

13. What, according to Kant, is substance?

14. What are phenomena and what are noumena? Why might the existence of phenomena force one to posit the existence of noumena?

15. What is Hume's skeptical challenge and how does Kant respond to that challenge?