

Philosophy Comprehensive Examination Questions

Distance Learning Program for the Master of Arts in Philosophy at Holy Apostles College & Seminary

General Information

The comprehensive examination for the Holy Apostles College and Seminary Distance Learning Program for a Master of Arts in Philosophy must be taken prior to graduation. Before you will be allowed to sit for the examination, you *must* complete all your course work, and, if applicable, complete your thesis.

Inform the Distance Learning Coordinator of your choice for a Testing Monitor. Make sure the testing monitor is aware that this examination is given over a six hour time period – three hours in the morning, a one hour break for lunch, and two hours in the afternoon. Prior to taking your exam, you will be mailed an invoice for \$80 to cover the comprehensive examination fee. Upon receipt of your completed exam, Holy Apostles College and Seminary will send a check for \$75 to your testing monitor.

Inform the Distance Learning Coordinator of your choice for a “major” from (1) Philosophy of Nature & Metaphysics, (2) Ethics, (3) History of Philosophy, or (4) Human Nature. The examination will consist of three questions in your major area, and one question in each of the other three disciplines. There will be some choice in the questions (e.g., you will choose three questions in your major area out of four or five questions that will be given to you).

Have enough knowledge to write for 45 minutes on each of the questions in your major area, and 30 minutes in each of the questions in the other three areas. The additional time given to you in your examination can be used to think about your answers and to check them.

Philosophy of Nature, Metaphysics

1. In the Aristotelian tradition there are **two places within the philosophy of nature** at which we are driven to affirm meta-physical being. Explain and discuss.
2. Discuss the question of proving the **existence of God**.
3. Aristotelian-Thomist metaphysics understands being as divisible into **act and potency** in two (Aristotle), and then in three (Thomas) different ways. Explain.
4. Explain the importance of the **analogy of being** in metaphysics.
5. Aristotle taught that the highest genera of material being are expressed in ten **“categories.”** Discuss.
6. Explain the **three degrees or levels of abstraction** and their relevance to philosophy of nature/metaphysics.
7. What are the **“transcendental concepts of being?”**

Ethics

1. How does Aristotle go about establishing the “**end**” of man and how does this contribute to Ethics?
2. Discuss the “**four cardinal virtues**” – their nature, their derivation, etc.
3. According to St. Thomas there are **four kinds of law**. Explain and discuss their interrelationship.
4. Discuss the issue of **conscience** and its role in the moral life.
5. What is the rule of “**double effect?**” Explain how it is necessary to any ethics that holds that there are absolute prohibitions or obligations, and discuss the limits of its applicability.
6. Explain and discuss the critique of “**consequentialism,**” (taking into account the teaching of *Veritatis Splendor*).
7. What are the “three fonts of morality?”

History of Philosophy

1. Discuss the legacy of **Parmenides** in Western thought.
2. Explain and discuss the validity of St. Anselm’s famous “**Ontological Argument.**”
3. Ancient and Medieval philosophy, and perhaps the whole history of Western philosophy to the present day, can be said to be dominated by the contrast and tension between **Plato and Aristotle**. Comment at length.
4. Discuss the importance of **Kant**.
5. **Descartes** is often called the “father of modern philosophy.” How is this so?
6. How, in detail, does the “**modern project**” differ from that of the Ancients, and how is it definitive for modern philosophies as different as empiricism and rationalism? Use specific examples.
7. The “**Pre-Socratic Philosophers**” have enjoyed a revival of popularity in Nietzsche and Heidegger. What is this about? In any case, selecting at least three of them, discuss their importance for the ensuing philosophical history.

Human Nature

1. Discuss **Cartesian Dualism** in relation to our understanding of man.
2. Discuss arguments for the **immortality** of the (human) soul.
3. What does it mean to talk about the human **person**?
4. What is **free will** and do human beings possess it?
5. Respond to the following quote from a well-known contemporary philosopher:
6. In explaining **knowing**, “according to Aristotle the mind participated in the being of the known object, rather than simply depicting it....But this theory totally depends on the philosophy of forms. Once one no longer explains the way things are in terms of the species that inform them, this conception of knowledge is untenable and rapidly becomes close to unintelligible. We have great difficulty in understanding it today.

7. Aided by the philosophy of nature Thomas distinguishes various “levels of soul” in the human being, and then various “powers,” etc. Describe them.
8. Can philosophy discern any meaning in human history?