

## *Contemporary Civilization ~ Fall 2004*

### STUDY GUIDE FOR FINAL EXAM

Here's a rough guide to topics that we discussed in class and that may come up in the exam.

#### Mediaeval Philosophy

##### *General*

- problem common to al-Ghazali, Averroës, Maimonides, Aquinas is how to use philosophical methods (especially Aristotelian ones) to interpret, explain, complement Scriptures
- except for al-Ghazali, all consider problem such as proofs for existence of God, nature of divine foreknowledge/predestination, afterlife (think about how they are similar/different)
- General issues of faith and reason – what is the relationship between faith and reason for each of these thinkers? -- What do each of them say about case where truths of reason conflict with truths of Scripture?

##### *Averroës*

- philosophy becomes necessary component of religion – Why is this?
- distinction between 2 kinds of statements in Qur'an: explicit and implicit – corresponds to two kind of people: masses and learned people -- (also Maimonides: two levels of Torah: secret/implicit and external reading – again – different kinds of people have different access, cf. also Galileo)
- philosophy looks into creation – need to understand creation to understand creator
- argument for the existence of God (version of argument from design)
- problems with this argument

##### *al-Ghazali*

- his skepticism
- arguments for why not to trust the senses (question: to what extent should we question reliability of our senses)
- dream-argument – how this shows the possibility that reason is also fallible
- mystical awareness – highest form of knowledge
- status of religious experience as support for religious claims

##### *Maimonides*

- arguments for why God can only be described by negative attributes: (i) ascribing to him affirmative attributes would be associating him with a body – this would imply imperfection, so he cannot have a body, so we can't describe him by means of affirmative attributes, (ii) ascribing to him affirmative attributes would mean he is a multiplicity – but God is not a multiplicity
- problem with (i) – do negative attributes imply positive ones?
- world created in time and passing away up to God

##### *Aquinas*

- Four kinds of law – cf. Aquinas handout
- What are they? What is the relationship between them? Why do we need laws? When is it OK to disobey?
- What is happiness for Aquinas?

- Aquinas and Plato and Aristotle (think about similarities, especially Aquinas and Plato)

### **Luther**

- the 3 solas – sola scriptura (by scripture alone), sola fides (by faith alone), sola gratia (by grace alone)
- What does each of these mean for Luther?
- doctrine of grace – how related to justification by faith
- doctrine of justification – what is it?
- Luther's early (Catholic) view on justification (and corresponding concept of righteousness of God) – how his view on these changed and why – what is the new concept of righteousness of God?
- 'justification by faith alone' – what does 'by faith alone' mean for Luther?
- 'Faith, not works' – Why do we still need to do good works? Does Luther provide an adequate account of why we still need good works?
- Christian Freedom – in what senses is a Christian free?

### *On Governmental Authority*

- What is the relationship between Christian morality and political rule?
- How can the law of Christ (turn the other cheek, love your enemies, do not resist evil) be reconciled with the existence of political authorities?
- distinction between temporal/spiritual authority and the two kingdoms (Kingdom of God in Heaven and Kingdom on earth – compare to Augustine)
- distinction between Christians and non-Christians and to whom laws apply

### **Machiavelli**

#### **The Prince**

- Why did he write the Prince? Why and for whom is he writing?
- What is his method (as opposed to Aristotle and Plato?)
- How is his conception of the state different from Plato and Aristotle?
- How is his project similar/different to Plato/Aristotle?

### *Human nature*

- his conception of human nature
- What follows from this conception of human nature? How is his view of human nature related to what a Prince should do?

### *Virtù and Fortuna*

- Fortuna and the river-analogy
- Relationship between virtù and fortuna
- Virtù: how is it different from virtue? Is it a morally neutral concept (cf. difference between Agathocles and Borgia)?
- well-used and badly-used cruelty
- For Machiavelli, what is the goal of a ruler?
- 'the end justifies the means'
- What's the end for Machiavelli?
- Does any end justify any means?

- Are there limits on the means?
- qualities a good prince needs to have
- Is M's conception of politics amoral/moral/immoral?

### Discourses

- How do they compare to the Prince? Similarities? Differences?
  - How can we see the *Discourses* as a continuation of *The Prince*?
  - Account of origin of society and justice – v. different from Socrates:  
People unite for mutual defence – strong ruler  
Perceive that harms done to others could be done to them as well  
Origins of justice (an invention) – select just ruler
  - Best form of government? – One that mixes elements from 3 basic forms (rule by one, few, many), with checks and balances
  - Conflict between many and few important for good government
  - concerned with accommodating people's *desires* (masses: not be oppressed, nobles: desire to play role in state and glory)
  - Concept of liberty: negative – freedom from constraint
  - Advantage of popular rule and why Machiavelli comes out in favour of it
  - Why social equality is important for good habits, and social inequality is source of problems in republic (kill gentlemen): want to bring together private and public interests
  - Religion & Christianity – what's his attitude to them?
  - Problem with Church – not strong enough to unify Italy, not weak enough to let someone else do it
  - Christianity, the way it's interpreted at the time, makes people weak
  - What is the role and importance of religion for Machiavelli? Should good rulers be religious?
  - View of human nature? How is this connected to Machiavelli's views on politics?
- Morality: Inconsistent with the Prince or not?

### Galileo

- how Galileo addresses people's doubts about the Copernican system
- how he conceives of the relationship between science and religion
- how he addresses the case in which there is conflict between literal reading of Scripture and science (i.e. how does one reconcile the authority of the Scripture with (bits of) science that appear to be inconsistent with it)?
- distinction between interpretative levels in Scripture
- distinction between different concerns of science and religion; what is the subject matter of each?
- Is Galileo successful in resolving conflicts between science and religion?

### Descartes

- Descartes' Method (Method of Doubt)
- How does it work? What is its goal? Why is it not enough to simply change beliefs locally?
- the 3 stages of doubt (and what each of them shows)
- the Cogito-principle (I think, therefore I am)

- How does Descartes arrive at the Cogito?
- Why does he think that he can know with certainty that he is a thinking thing?
- Is Descartes' argument for the Cogito convincing?
- Russell's objection & whether it is successful
- wax-example – what is it supposed to show?
- relationship between the senses and reason/understanding

#### *Descartes' principle of knowledge*

- "general rule that everything I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true" (p. 70, 35)
- Why is this? What does this mean? What is the significance of this for Descartes?

- Why is it important for Descartes to prove the existence of God?
- The Cartesian Circle
- distinction between res extensa (extended thing) and res cogitans (thinking thing)
- Descartes' dualism (mind and body are distinct substances)
- Why does Descartes think mind and body are distinct?
- What are the problems with this?

#### **Hobbes**

- Hobbes's materialism (contrast to Descartes)
- How are Hobbes's and Descartes' accounts of knowledge different?
- Hobbes's views on morality – ie. what is morality for Hobbes?
- Why should we act morally?
- What motivates us?
- Are his views on this plausible?
- Hobbes's conception of human nature
- The State of Nature (illustrated by Prisoners' Dilemma)
- 3 reasons for war in state of nature
- postulate of (relative) equality
- Natural Laws (especially the first law of nature)
- Natural Rights
- In what sense can they be said to be laws and rights (compare Aquinas and Locke on natural laws, and Locke on natural rights)
- Why should we obey laws of nature? Are they divine commands, moral laws, or prudential laws (based on self-interest)?
- What is the nature of the social contract for Hobbes?
- Why does it have to be the way it is? Why can it not be any other way?
- Why do people enter the contract? Why do we need a sovereign?
- What is the nature of the sovereign? Why does the sovereign have to be this way?
- What are the implications of Hobbes's conception of the sovereign? Can the sovereign be unjust?
- What is the relationship between the sovereign and the people?

- Why do we have political obligations?
- Do we have to fear the sovereign? Why or why not?
- Is the sovereign subject to civil laws?
- Why does Hobbes reject separation of powers?
- In what sense is Hobbes anti-revolutionary?
- Problems for Hobbes's account?

## **Locke**

### **Second Treatise**

- conception of natural law (laws of nature)
- conception of natural right
- State of Nature
- compare all these to Hobbes – how are they similar/different?
- Who executes natural laws in state of nature?
- Why, according to Locke, leave the state of nature?
- Why is absolute power illegitimate?
- two-stage view of social contract (compare to Hobbes's notion of social contract)
- Who contracts with whom to do what and why?
- Why should you obey the government?
- Express consent and tacit consent
- What is the idea of tacit consent? Is the idea of tacit consent a good one or is it problematic in some ways?
- When are you allowed to disobey the government? Why?
- Problems with Locke's views on rebellion (would people constantly be revolting at slightest inconvenience? What about minority rights?)

### **A Letter Concerning Toleration**

- What are Locke's arguments for religious toleration?
- Why should Christians not be involved in religious persecution? What is a Church and what is its function?
- Why should the government not be concerned with advancing religious interests of citizens? What is the purpose of government?
- What is the extent of toleration of both the Church and the government?
- Why shouldn't Catholics and atheists be tolerated?
- Does Locke provide convincing arguments for religious toleration?
- Do his arguments justify other forms of toleration?

### **Hume ~ Of the Original Contract**

- What are Hume's objections to the idea that consent is the legitimate basis of government?
- Are his objections justified?
- What is his criticism of tacit consent?
- How could Locke reply to Hume?
- Who makes the more convincing case?

**Some general themes to consider**

- how different authors conceive of equality – how this shapes/affects their views on (political) society
- how important belief in the existence of (a) God is to successful functioning of society – What are the advantages/disadvantages/social and political effects of a shared religious belief (or its absence)? In what ways does reliance on religious arguments weaken/strengthen the positions of otherwise secular theories?
- How would the authors we have read comment on each other's form of government?
- What do the authors conceive of as the primary function/purpose of society/government? To what extent does this shape their views on political organisation (ie. authoritarian, democratic)?
- how different authors conceive of the limits of obedience to government – under what circumstances is there a right to resist authority?
- how different authors conceive of human nature and how this shapes their view of government
- how plausible or implausible you find any of these views and why