

## Knowledge

### Reading

- [1] Descartes, *First Meditation* (AT VII 17–23), in J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, & D. Murdoch (1984). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. I, (pp. 12–5). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Abbr. CSM]
- [2] Leibniz, *Meditation on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas* (extract), in R. Ariew & D. Garber (1989). *Leibniz: Philosophical Essays* (pp. 23–5). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing. [Abbr. AG]
- [3] Spinoza, from the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (§§ 18–29), in E. Curley (1994). *A Spinoza Reader* (pp. 48–51). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- [4] Spinoza, from the *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. J. Israel (2007) (ch. 4, §4). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Write no more than a few sentences for each question, which are meant to guide your reading and understanding. Bring your written answers (and new questions that arise from your reading) to the next meeting for discussion. You will receive a few comments on return. The questions marked with an asterisk are optional.

- [1] Why is it relevant to ‘demolish everything completely’? (AT VII 17–18, cf. numbers in margins)
- ★ [1] Do you find the dreaming doubt convincing? (AT VII 19)
- [1] Describe Descartes’s ‘withholding policy’ and his plan (AT VII 22). Do you think this is a good strategy?
- [2] Make a list of your own examples for things we know clearly, distinctly, adequately, and intuitively.
- [3] Why should we aim for intuitive knowledge? How can we attain it?
- [4] Why is it important to learn about nature?
- ★ [4] What is the connection between knowledge and happiness?

*Background Information.* For Spinoza, an idea is *adequate* if it reveals all the properties of an object, and hence allows us to deduce every fact about the object (cf. *Ethics* IID4). Hence we can fully understand and explain what it is to be this object, and how it relates to other objects. An adequate idea is also *true* if it conforms to (or ‘agrees’ with) the object. Since human cognition is finite, we could not have maximally adequate ideas; yet, insofar as we grasp the logical and causal ‘order and connection’ of things in the world, our knowledge is adequate and true. In this case, our intellectual grasp of the world may be from an absolute or eternal perspective (*sub specie aeternitatis*): we then know *how things really are* in Nature.