

Substance

Reading (see copies for full bibliographic details)

- [1] Descartes, from the *Second Replies* (AT VII 161–2).
- [2] Descartes, from the *Principles of Philosophy*, Part I §§51–4, 60–2, Part II §§1–4.
- [3] Leibniz, from the *Discourse on Metaphysics*, §§8–12.
- [4] ★ Leibniz, from a *Letter to Arnauld* (28 November/8 December 1686)
- [5] Leibniz, from *Principles of Nature and Grace, Based on Reason*, §§1–2.
- [6] ★ Leibniz, from the *Monadology*, §§1–30.

1. [1] [2] What is a substance for Descartes?
- 2.★ [1] [2] How many kinds of substances are there? Of each kind, how many particular substances are there?
- 3.★ [2] Sketch Descartes's proof for material things. (You can also consult the *Sixth Meditation*, where this argument first appears.)
- 4.★ [2] What is the essence of nature of body? Why?
5. [3] [5] [6] Ignoring details, what do you think are the central features of substance for Leibniz? (You can find a perhaps more accessible translation on earlymoderntexts.com, available for free.)
- 6.★ [3] [4] Why are bodies not substances? If they are not substances, what are they?

Background Information. An *attribute* is a substance's nature or essence. An *essence* is that without which the substance could not exist, or would not be what it is. So, an attribute determines what kind of thing something is: if x 's nature is K , then x is a K -thing. For Descartes, there are two attributes: thought and extension. For Spinoza, there are infinitely many attributes, two of which are known to us. In addition to attributes, substances have properties, 'accidents', or modes. They are qualified in certain ways. A mode is a modification of some attribute, i.e. a way in which thought, say, can occur. For instance, *remembering Paris* is a mode of thought, and so is *feeling thirsty*. It is a notorious question whether one thing could have two attributes (cf. Reading [2] §53). There is a *conceptual distinction* between substance and attribute (Reading [2] §62), i.e. the distinction between the two is 'merely' conceptual. We cannot understand or think about substance apart from its attribute(s): we conceive substance 'through' (by means of) its attribute(s). A *predicate* is what we say of, or attribute to, something, *viz.* the subject. Predication is the process of such an attribution. According to an Aristotelian view, a substance is the subject of predication (a thing that has properties). A *unum per accidens* (Reading [4]) is an accidental unity, such as a flock of sheep. A substance is a true unity, a *unum per se* (a one through itself).