



**Strathmore**  
UNIVERSITY

**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES  
BACHELOR OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AND PHILOSOPHY  
END OF SEMESTER EXAMINATION**

**BDP 4101 READINGS OF CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHERS**

**DATE: 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2023**

**Time: 13:00 – 15:00**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** This exam has TWO SECTIONS. Answer **all** questions in SECTION ONE and **any other three** questions in SECTION TWO.

**SECTION ONE (30 marks)**

1. As we have seen from the readings covered throughout the course, contemporary is characteristically ideological. This means that they are essentially reductivist and highly emotive, in order to convince and control the masses. Now, reductivism is also known as “absolutising the relative.” Therefore, explain what it means to “absolutise the relative,” why philosophers tend to do so, and provide a relevant example of this. (5 marks)
2. As a consequence of reductivism, Ideologies exhibit three characteristics listed below. Explain what each of them is, providing an example of a philosopher and how their ideas reflect that characteristic.
  - a. Substitution. (5 marks)
  - b. Immanentism. (5 marks)
  - c. Salvation. (5 marks)
3. Contemporary philosophy is known to be a culmination of the ideas of Modern Philosophy, which was preceded by a break from the Medieval worldview. In that, we see a shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric worldview, culminating in an egocentric worldview. Explain how this transition of worldviews occurred. (5 marks)
4. Contemporary Philosophy is also seen as putting mankind in a position of struggle between finitude and transcendence. Briefly explain how this struggle arises, and explain the three general ways that many contemporary philosophers followed in order to resolve it. (5 marks)

## SECTION TWO (30 Marks)

5. "I suggest that we think of liberalism as a certain way of drawing the map of the social and political world. ... Confronting this world, liberal theorists preached and practiced an art of separation." *Michael Walzer, Liberalism: The art of separation.*

As Michael Walzer calls Liberalism "The art of separation," Identify and explain the four kinds of separation that arose, and what kind of liberalism they each created. (10 marks)

6. "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed nonage (immaturity). Nonage is the inability to use one's own understanding without another's guidance. ... Dare to know! (Sapere aude.) "Have the courage to use your own understanding," is therefore the motto of the enlightenment." *Immanuel Kant, What is Enlightenment.*

- According to Kant, what causes this self-imposed nonage, who propagates it, and how can it be overcome? (5 marks)
- What are some of the problems and contradictions that Kant overlooks when he encourages us to 'use your own understanding without another's guidance'? (5 marks)

7. "We have left the land and have gone aboard ship! We have broken down the bridge behind us, - nay, more, the land behind us! Well, little ship! look out! Beside thee is the ocean; it is true it does not always roar, and sometimes it spreads out like silk and gold and a gentle reverie. But times will come when thou wilt feel that it is infinite, and that there is nothing more frightful than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt itself free, and now strikes against the walls of this cage! Alas, if home sickness for the land should attack thee, as if there had been more freedom there, and there is no "land" any longer!" *Friedrich Nietzsche, The Joyful Wisdom, Aphorisms.*

- The text above alludes to Nietzsche's "transvaluation of values." What exactly does this mean, and what parts of the passage make reference to it? (5 marks)
- Explain how Nietzsche's transvaluation of values and the frightfulness of infinity highlights the tension between freedom and security. (5 marks)

8. "A problem is something which I meet, which I find complete before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and its initial validity. ... It is, no doubt, always possible (logically and psychologically) to degrade a mystery so as to turn it into a problem. ... We must carefully avoid all confusion between the mysterious and the unknowable. The unknowable is in fact only the limiting case of the problematic, which cannot be actualised without contradiction." *Gabriel Marcel, Being and Having.*

- Explain how it is possible to 'degrade a mystery so as to turn it into a problem,' and provide an example to illustrate. (5 marks)
- We have seen that there is a difference between problems and mysteries. In the excerpt above however, Marcel makes a distinction between Mysteries and the "unknowable." How does this distinction arise, and can you illustrate it with a relevant example? (5 marks)