

PHILOSOPHY 3340 – EPISTEMOLOGY

THE FINAL EXAMINATION

GENERAL OVERVIEW AND POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

INSTRUCTIONS

The instructions on the final examination will be as follows:

1. Answer THREE of the following questions.
2. The examination is divided into sections corresponding to different topics in the course, as indicated below. The three questions that you answer must be selected from THREE DIFFERENT sections.
3. The examination is two and one-half hours in length, plus ten minutes reading time.
4. It is a closed book examination.

FINAL EXAMINATION QUESTIONS: AN OVERVIEW

Here is some information concerning how the questions on the final examination will be related to the topics listed in the course syllabus.

1. We may very well not wind up covering, this semester, all of the topics listed in the syllabus, and this will affect how many questions there on each topic.
2. There will be no question on the final examination on Topic I – Introduction: Epistemology and Philosophy.
3. In the case of all of the other topics that we have covered in class – and this should include topics II through VII – there will be at least two questions on each topic, and possibly more.
4. In the case of topics listed in the syllabus that will not have been covered in class – and this will probably be topics VIII and IX– there will still be at least one question – but quite possibly no more – on each of those topics. The reason for including at least one question on each of those topics is that some people in class may, because of their interests, have done the relevant readings for those topics, or may have written essays on them.

FINAL EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

The questions on the final examination will be selected from the following questions.

Topic II. The Problem of Analyzing the Concept of Knowledge

1. What sort of analysis was traditionally offered of the concept of knowledge? What is the most important objection (or objections) that might be offered against that analysis? Can the traditional analysis be defended? If so, indicate how. If not, outline what you take to be the most plausible account of the concept of knowledge, and defend it against possible objections.

2. Carefully set out one of the two counterexamples that Gettier offered to the traditional analysis of knowledge. In doing this, you should begin by offering a clear account of the analysis of knowledge that Gettier's objection is directed against. Then you should set out Gettier's objection in a step-by-step fashion that makes explicit the assumptions involved in his argument. Is his objection sound? If you think that it is not, explain why. If you think it is sound, briefly sketch how you think the concept of knowledge should be analyzed so as to avoid his objection.

3. Set out a very brief but clear summary of, and then critically evaluate, the analysis of the concept of knowledge that is defended by any **one** of the following three authors in the following selections contained in *Epistemology – Contemporary Readings*: Alvin Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing"; Keith Lehrer and Thomas Paxson, "Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief"; Robert Nozick, "Knowledge".

Topic III. Skepticism

1. In the case of beliefs about physical states of affairs, an important skeptical argument takes the following form: (1) Beliefs about physical states of affairs cannot be non-inferentially justified; (2) There is a logical gap between the content of such beliefs and the evidence upon which those beliefs are based; (3) There is no deductive way of bridging that gap; (4) There is no inductive way of bridging the gap; (5) The only possible ways of bridging such a gap are deductively and inductively; (6) Therefore there is no possible way of justifying the knowledge claims in question.

Indicate the sort of support that a skeptic might offer for the second, third, and fourth steps in the above argument. What are the main ways in which one might attempt to respond to this argument?

2. In Chapter II of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* – "The Lure of Radical Skepticism" – Michael Huemer sets out four arguments for radical skepticism. Of those four arguments, which seems the most challenging? Offer a clear but succinct formulation of the skeptical argument in question, and then discuss how one might best attempt to answer that argument.

3. In Chapter III of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* – "Easy Answers to Skepticism" – Michael Huemer sets out and defends what he calls the "G. E. Moore Shift" reply to skepticism. Carefully set out, and then evaluate, this reply to skepticism. If you think this general response to skepticism is sound, defend it against an important objection. If you think it is suspect, indicate what you take to be a crucial objection to this response.

4. Carefully outline, and then critically evaluate, the response that is set out and defended by Hilary Putnam in his article "Brains in a Vat" to the brain-in-a-vat argument for skepticism concerning the existence of physical objects.

Topic IV. The Justification of Induction

1. Briefly outline Hume's argument for the conclusion that it is impossible to justify induction. What are some important attempts to answer Hume's challenge? Which response seems to you the most promising, and why? Is that response exposed to any serious objections?

2. Briefly set out, and then critically evaluate, John Foster's approach to the problem of justifying induction that he defends in his essay "Induction, Explanation, and Natural Necessity".

3. After explaining the difference between a governing law conception of laws of nature and a non-governing, supervenience conception of laws of nature, discuss the bearing of those two different conceptions on the problem of justifying induction. Is the problem of justifying induction equally difficult on either conception? If so, why? If not, why not?

Topic V. Theories of Justification: Foundationalism and Coherentism

1. What is meant by the contention that knowledge, or justified belief, has foundations? Outline briefly the most important alternative positions that philosophers have defended in response to the question of whether knowledge, or justified belief, has foundations. Which position do you think is most plausible, and why?

2. Carefully outline, and then discuss and evaluate, the classical, epistemic regress argument for the existence of noninferential knowledge, or noninferentially justified belief.

3. What is the coherentist approach to knowledge, or justified belief? After briefly describing coherentism, set out one important objection to coherentism. How would a defender of coherentism respond to that objection? Do you think that the response is successful or not?

4. Carefully and clearly outline, and then discuss and evaluate, the Foundherentist account of empirical justification advanced by Susan Haack.

Topic VI. Perceptual Knowledge of the External World

1. Carefully set out, and then evaluate, what you take to be the most important objection (or objections) to the view that experiences involve emergent, 'sensuous', qualitative properties with which one is directly acquainted.

2. What are the central claims that Bishop Berkeley is defending in the excerpt from *Of the Principles of Human Knowledge* contained in *Epistemology – Contemporary Readings*? Focus on any one argument that Berkeley offers, and after carefully setting out that argument in a clear and explicit, step-by-step fashion, discuss whether the argument is sound.

3. After summarizing the main features of Thomas Reid's approach to perception as set out in the excerpt from his book *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* contained in *Epistemology – Contemporary Readings*, offer a critical evaluation of Reid's approach to perception.

4. What is "fictionalist phenomenalism", or the "As-If" view of perception? What argument might be offered for this view? Is this view open to any important objections? Do you think that the view is defensible or not?

Topic VII. Michael Huemer on Direct Realism Versus Indirect Realism

1. In Chapter IV of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, Michael Huemer defends the view that one is directly aware, in perception, of physical states of affairs. After explaining what Michael Huemer means by (1) **awareness**, and (2) **direct** awareness, briefly describe his defense of the view that one is directly aware of external, physical things, and then discuss whether his defense is successful or not.
2. In Chapter V of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, Michael Huemer defends the view that perception can provide one with non-inferentially justified beliefs about physical objects, by appealing to a Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism. Briefly set out, and then critically evaluate, the argument that he offers.
3. Foundationalist principles specify the conditions under which one can have non-inferentially justified beliefs. Two important alternative principles here are (1) the Principle of Phenomenal Conservatism, and (2) the General Principle of Direct Acquaintance. After carefully explaining each of those two principles, discuss their relative merits, and indicate which you think is preferable.
4. In Chapter VII of *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, Michael Huemer develops an objection to indirect realism (the representative theory of perception) that is directed against the postulation of sense-data. Carefully outline, and then evaluate, that objection. What do you think is the best reply to the objection, and can it be sustained?

Topic VIII. Knowledge of the Past

1. Why is there a problem about the justification of beliefs about past events? What important alternative accounts might be offered of the justification of such beliefs, and which account seems to you the most promising? Why do you think that the account in question is to be preferred to the alternatives?
2. What account of memory knowledge does Norman Malcolm offer in the selection "A Definition of Factual Memory" contained in *Epistemology – Contemporary Readings*? After carefully setting out Malcolm's account, offer a critical evaluation of it. Do you think it is sound or not, and why?
3. Outline the account of memory knowledge that is advanced by Michael Huemer in his essay "The Problem of Memory Knowledge". What seems to you to be the most important thesis that Huemer is advancing there? What argument does Huemer offer for that thesis? Is the thesis correct or not?

Topic IX. A Priori Knowledge

1. It has often been maintained that all *a priori* knowledge is knowledge of the truth of statements that are analytically true. What are the strongest arguments for and against this claim? Which view on this matter do you think is correct, and why?
2. Carefully set out, and then evaluate, Quine's arguments for the conclusion that there is no satisfactory way of drawing a distinction between analytic statements and synthetic statements.