Epistemology MA exam/Summer 2011

Answer one question from each part. Time limit: 3 hours

Part I

1. Some philosophers argue that for all we know we could be brains in vats, or bodies in capsules, and that therefore we don’t know anything about “the external world.” Explicate this argument and then evaluate it.

2. When G.E. Moore tries to refute the skeptic by showing her his hands, has he missed the point?

3. Some might say, “There is admittedly some difference between ‘the first person perspective’ and ‘the third person perspective’. But the difference is without consequence for epistemology. There is nothing we can know from the first person perspective that is unknowable from the third. There is no significant immunity from error that the first person perspective enjoys over the third. It is true that it is easier to gain warrant for certain claims (like the claim that one is in pain) from the first person perspective. But it is likewise easier to gain warrant for certain other claims (like the claim that the Antarctic is icy) from the ‘South Pole perspective’. Evaluate this argument.

Part II

4. There is considerable disagreement over whether it is important to solve the Gettier problem, and attention has shifted to the question of what the existence of the Gettier problem means for epistemology. What does the existence of the Gettier problem mean for epistemology, and what direction should epistemology take in the future as a consequence?

5. Is coherentism ultimately only a sophisticated form of circular reasoning?

6. What is the argument from illusion? What is it meant to show and what does it show?

Part III

7. Many philosophers before recent times considered geometry as an exemplar of knowledge. Does geometry provide us with knowledge of necessary truths, or even truths about the world? What, if anything, might be learned from considering the case of geometry about other domains of inquiry?

8. “no statement is immune to revision. Revision even of the logical law of the excluded middle has been proposed … What difference is there is principle
between such a shift and the shift whereby Kepler superceded Ptolemy …?” Are the laws of logic revisable?

9. What, according to Kripke, are the most serious problems for our alleged knowledge of other minds? Can they be overcome?