MA Examination in Epistemology
December 2011

Please answer one question from each section. Avoid overlapping answers.

Part I.

1. Could we be brains in vats? If not, why not? If we could, does anything important follow as regards skepticism about the external world?

2. How is the argument from hallucination supposed to establish the existence of sense-data? What is the disjunctivist response? Does it work? If not, are we committed to thinking that sense-data exist?

3. Can we make sense of the direct perception of external objects? If not, does skepticism about the external world follow?

Part II.

4. What sort of difficulty for traditional accounts of knowledge is supposed to be posed by the possibility of "Gettier cases"? How serious is the difficulty? What, if anything, does the history of failed attempts to respond to the Gettier problem (if it is a problem) show? What would be a promising direction for future research?

5. It has been suggested that "relevant alternatives" accounts of knowledge, either "contextualist" or "invariantist," allow for a satisfying response to, or even a refutation of, certain forms of skepticism. Present and explicate what you take to be the most plausible "relevant alternatives" account of knowledge, explain how it might be thought to remove the threat of skepticism, and discuss the account critically.

6. Present and motivate the position known as "other minds skepticism." Why has the argument from analogy drawn so much criticism as a response to skepticism with respect to other minds? Is there a better response?

Part III

7. Some contemporary philosophers, most notably John McDowell, have argued that human experience is "conceptualized." What do you take them to mean? What motivates their position? What are some of the most serious objections to the position? Assess the debate.

8. "Part of one's epistemic duty is to reflect critically upon one's beliefs, and such critical reflection precludes believing things to which one has, to one's knowledge, no reliable means of epistemic access." What is at stake in the view expressed here? Is the view correct?
9. What are the most fundamental intuitions motivating the "internalist" and "externalist" positions as regards epistemic justification? Does the internalist/externalist distinction in epistemology have any analogues in other branches of philosophy? Is there any way of resolving the internalist/externalist dispute?