Epistemology MA exam/Winter 2012

Answer one question from each part. Time limit: 4 hours

Part I

1. What is Moore’s ‘proof of an external world’? Present Moore’s proof and then discuss it critically.

2. “The skeptic repudiates science because it is vulnerable to illusion on its own showing; and my own criticism of the skeptic is that he is overreacting.” What objection to skepticism is Quine lodging when he criticizes defenders of skepticism for overreacting? Explain whether this objection is, or is not, an adequate response to skeptical challenges.

3. In ‘A Defence of Common Sense’ G. E. Moore lists propositions that he ‘knows, with certainty, to be true’. What are those propositions? Does Moore know them to be true? In On Certainty (remark 6), Wittgenstein says that to attempt to enumerate what one knows in the way Moore does involves a ‘misuse’ of the expression ‘I know’. Why does Wittgenstein think that? Is he right?

Part II

4. How are “internalism” and “externalism” understood in the context of epistemic justification? What are the most fundamental intuitions motivating each of the two positions? Is there any way of resolving the dispute between the two positions?

5. In the first Meditation, Descartes’ argues that an evil genius could fool him even about mathematical and geometrical (or conceptual) truths such as that two plus three make five or that a square does not have more than four sides. Is it possible that we may be mistaken about basic mathematical and geometrical truths? Is it possible that someone could be fooling us about such truths?

6. One of the central questions in modern epistemology is whether there are any incorrigible beliefs. Why has this question been so important? Should it continue to be? Explain your answer.

Part III

7. Kim accuses Quine’s naturalized epistemology of jettisoning the normative. What does this mean? Does naturalized epistemology jettison the normative?

8. What is the argument from hallucination? What does it show and what is it meant to show?
9. What is the problem of induction? Why is (or why isn’t) it a problem?