Question Pool for Epistemology MA Exam, Winter 2012

1. What is Moore’s ‘proof of an external world’? Present Moore’s proof and then discuss it critically.
2. 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?
3. If we were to treat epistemology from a scientific perspective, which science or sciences should we appeal to? Quine seems to assume that the appeal should be to the cognitive and/or brain sciences, but what about the sociology of knowledge? Are there other possibilities? What, if anything, of epistemological significance hangs on the choice?
4. What is the argument from hallucination? What does it show and what is it meant to show?
5. 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?
6. In the Meno, Socrates and his interlocutors discuss the difference between knowledge and true opinion, and the significance of that difference. What (if any) is the difference between knowledge and true opinion? Does that difference ever make a difference? Does it ever matter whether a person knows that such and such or only has the true opinion that such and such?
7. 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?
8. What is the problem of induction? Why is (or why isn’t) it a problem?
9. Williamson (Knowledge and its limits) thinks we can remember it was raining without knowing that it was raining, but we can’t remember that it was raining without knowing that it was raining. Russell thinks we remember things that never happened. He seems, therefore, to be agreeing with Williamson, at least with respect to remembering (if not remembering that). Moore (Four forms of scepticism) thinks Russell’s claim is confused. Who’s right?
10. 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.
11. “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.
12. Kim accuses Quine’s naturalized epistemology of jettisoning the normative. What does this mean? Does naturalized epistemology jettison the normative?