Area of strength: Epistemology Spring 2015

Part 1

1. In what sense, if any, is G.E. Moore’s proof of an external world a proof?
2. It seems, for any standard skeptical hypothesis (e.g., the brain-in-a-vat, dreaming, or virtual reality hypotheses), that we can imagine evidence that would count in favor of its truth. Could the lack of any actual evidence to this effect give us good reason to suppose that the hypothesis is false? What, if any, response to Humean skepticism about the external world can the line of thought indicated by this question give us?
3. How is the argument from hallucination supposed to establish the existence of sense-data? Evaluate Austin’s objection to the argument.

Part 2

4. Hume famously posed the problem of induction. Goodman claimed that while Hume gave an adequate answer to that problem, there was a “new riddle” of induction to worry about. What is Goodman’s new riddle? In what ways (if any) does Goodman’s riddle differ from Hume’s original problem? What, in your view, is the most promising solution to Goodman’s riddle?
5. The prevailing approach in formal epistemology relies on probability to represent degrees of belief and uses Bayes’ rule to model how we update our beliefs with new evidence. Does probability do an adequate job capturing the dynamics of belief? Or does it have limitations that make an alternative framework necessary? Defend your answer.
6. “The skeptic repudiates science because it is vulnerable to illusion on its own showing; and my only criticism of the skeptic is that he is overreacting.” What objection to skepticism is Quine lodging when he criticizes skeptics for overreacting? Explain whether this objection is, or is not, an adequate response to skeptical challenges.

Part 3

7. 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?
8. 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?
9. In ordinary contexts we seem to credit ourselves with knowledge even when the possibility of error has not been ruled out on logical or conceptual grounds. If this practice is legitimate, what—if anything—does it show about the role of certainty or infallibility in knowledge or knowledge claims?