Epistemology MA Exam/Winter 2016

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

Part I

1. Lewis argues that justification is not always necessary for knowledge. He writes:

   What (non-circular) argument supports our reliance on perception, on memory, and on testimony? And yet we do gain knowledge by these means. And sometimes, far from having supporting arguments, we don’t even know how we know.

   Is this right? Discuss.

2. What is Kripke’s knowing paradox? Evaluate some solutions to it.

3. Lewis writes:

   ‘He knows, yet he has not eliminated all possibilities of error.’ Even if you’ve numbed your ears, doesn’t this overt, explicit fallibilism still sound wrong?

   Is fallibilism this bad? Does “knowledge” really imply infallibility?

Part II

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

5. Is coherentism just a sophisticated form of circular reasoning? And if so, is that a bad thing?

6. Russell thinks we remember things that never happened. Moore thinks that’s confused. Who’s right?

Part III

7. Do skeptical arguments naturally arise from our ordinary practices of knowledge ascription or justification, or (instead) are they the result of substantial theoretical presuppositions as Williams argues? Justify your answer.

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

9. Williamson suggests that,
the working hypothesis should be that the concept *knows* cannot be analyzed into more basic concepts.

That is, a definition of the notion of knowledge in other terms isn’t possible. On the other hand, Lewis writes,

Subject *S* knows proposition *P* iff *P* holds in every possibility left uneliminated by *S*’s evidence; equivalently, iff *S*’s evidence eliminates every possibility in which not-*P*.

Is what Lewis is offering a definition of knowledge in more basic concepts? Does this contradict Williamson? Why or why not?