Spring 2017
Epistemology MA Comp Exam

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

Part I

1. Harman and Lewis describe knowledge—the ordinary concept of knowledge—as allowing that evidence brought to one’s attention can make one no longer know what one once knew. Is this compatible with how we ordinarily use the word “know”?

2. Is knowledge possible without belief? Can we know things that we don’t believe, or don’t believe that we know, or that we haven’t thought about one way or the other at all?

3. There is considerable disagreement over whether it is important to solve the Gettier problem, and attention has shifted to the question of what the existence of the Gettier problem means for epistemology. What does the existence of the Gettier problem mean for epistemology, and what direction should epistemology take in the future as a consequence?

Part II

4. Is coherentism ultimately only a sophisticated form of circular reasoning?

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

6. BonJour writes:

Thus it finally seems possible to make sense of externalism only by construing the externalist as simply abandoning the traditional notion of epistemic justification and along with it anything resembling the traditional conception of knowledge.

Is this right? Does externalism require such dramatic revisions in our traditional notions?

Part III

7. What is Moore’s “proof of an external world”? Present Moore’s proof and then discuss it critically. Is it an adequate response to skepticism?

8. Can a contextualist position, of one sort or another, about knowledge be used against skepticism? Describe one or more contextualist positions (Lewis, DeRose, Cohen, etc.) and evaluate their success against skepticism.
9. 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.