

## **Phil. 270/570: Epistemology Final Exam Questions and Directions**

**Directions:** Our final is on Tuesday, Dec. 21, at 7pm, in PH 310 (our normal class room).

You will have to answer three questions, in bluebooks that I will provide. All the questions that appear on the final will be taken from the nine displayed below. (Some or all of these questions will comprise the test.) From the questions that appear on the test, you will be given some choice as to which three you answer. The nicest test you might be faced with, I suppose: All nine questions appear, and you are to choose any three of them to answer. The nastiest: Four of the questions appear, and you are instructed to answer three of those four. Another possibility: questions are divided into three groups, and you are instructed to answer one question from each group. But however it is done, you will have to answer three questions; the questions you can answer will all be taken from the list below; you will have some choice; and you won't get stuck with any given question, so you can neglect to prepare to answer one of the nine questions below (the one you like least, I suppose), safe in the knowledge that you won't get stuck with it.

Though excellent exams can be written in the space of 2 hours, you will be given a total of 2-1/2 hours to complete your exam; at 9:30 pm you will have to turn in your work if you haven't done so already. [Fine print: Yale regulations state: "Final examinations normally last either two or three hours but, in either case, students are permitted to take an additional half-hour before being required to turn in their answers." Our exam, then, officially lasts for 2 hours. That, plus the half-hour of extra time, which may be used to wrap up your work, yields the total of 2-1/2 hours that you have before work must be turned in.] So, in preparing for the final, keep in mind that you will have an average of 50 minutes per questions to write your answers. (That 50 minutes includes extra time; you can also think of it as 40 minutes of normal time and 10 minutes of extra time per question).

I realize that you will be left more on your own in preparing your answers to some of these questions, as compared with some others, which latter are on material we talked about more in class. This doesn't mean those on which you are left more to your own devices won't appear: It's in fact a good idea to have at least a question or two that leave you more on your own in that way. But that you're more on your own in those questions will be taken into account when your answers to those questions are evaluated.

You are, of course, allowed to make use of both the readings and your notes in preparing for the exam (and indeed, you are encouraged to do so), but at the time of the exam, you will have to write your answers from memory, without the aid of papers or notes—or, of course, of each other.

### **Questions:**

1. Conservatism (Readings 9 and 10). What is conservatism in epistemology? What is the basic idea of Huemer's particular version of conservatism? What is the best reason for accepting conservatism, and what is the best way of resisting it? Is conservatism a promising approach to questions of epistemic justification? Explain and defend your answer.

2. Siegel (Reading 11). Using Siegel's example of Jill and Jack as an illustration, explain what Siegel means by "cognitive penetration," how situations involving cognitive penetration can be "epistemically pernicious" (phrase used at p. 202), and how and why Siegel thinks the phenomenon of cognitive penetration poses a problem for and a challenge to "dogmatism" (explaining the nature of the kind of "dogmatism" Siegel takes as her target). Is Siegel right that dogmatism faces such a challenge? If not, why not? If so, how might dogmatism best meet the challenge? Explain and defend your answer.

3. Putnam (Reading 12). Explain:

a. how Putnam argues that we are not brains vats;

b. how this argument can best be put to use against philosophical skepticism; and  
c. what seem to you the two strongest objections to the anti-skeptical strategy you've described in b (these can be objections to Putnam's argument and/or to the use of that argument against the skeptic).

4. Nozick (Readings 16 and 5). Explain:

- a. briefly but accurately: Nozick's theory of knowledge;
- b. Nozick's position on the question of whether "closure" holds for knowledge;
- c. at greater length: Nozick's treatment of the problem of skepticism; and
- d. what seems to you the most serious objections to Nozick's treatment of skepticism. In the final analysis, how successful do you find his treatment of skepticism?

5. Kelly & KDR (Readings 14 and 15): Explain what Kelly means by his claim that "the skeptic simply cannot win," and why he believes this claim, making sure to explain what a "Moorean fact" is. Why does KDR think the skeptic is not doomed from the start. When, if ever, do you think a philosophical argument to a surprising conclusion can rationally be resisted, even when one is unable to locate a flaw in the argument? Do you think skeptics have any hope of constructing arguments for radical skeptical conclusions that can make it rational for us to accept those conclusions? Why or why not?

(Note: If questions 6 and 7 both appear on the final, there will be some mechanism to prevent you from answering both of them. Question 7 will be on the final as an option.)

6. Contextualism and skepticism (Readings 17 and 18). Explain the basic contextualist strategy for dealing with skepticism, as deployed by Stine, and then the basics of DeRose's contextualist response to skepticism in "Solving the Skeptical Problem," including where he departs from Stine. How plausible do you think the basic strategy is, and how successful is DeRose's particular use of it? Explain and defend your answer.

7. Contextualism and Skepticism (Reading 18). Explain the basic contextualist strategy for dealing with skepticism, and the basics of DeRose's contextualist response to skepticism in "Solving the Skeptical Problem," explaining why DeRose thinks his solution is better than the "straightforward" (non-contextualist) solutions (mainly in sect. 14), and making sure to explain his arguments in sections 15-16 that his solution is better than that of the "bold skeptic." How plausible do you think the basic strategy is, and how successful is DeRose's particular use of it? Explain and defend your answer.

8. Plantinga (Reading 19). Briefly explain the evidentialist objection that Alvin Plantinga responds to in "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" Explain what "Classical Foundationalism" is, how Plantinga thinks the evidentialist objection is rooted in Classical Foundationalism, and, briefly, Plantinga's attack on Classical Foundationalism. Explain Plantinga's claim that beliefs such as (6)-(10) on pp. 46-47 can be properly basic, and how that claim allows him to answer the evidentialist objection to theistic belief. Finally, explain and critically assess Plantinga's defense of his claim that such theistic beliefs are properly basic, and his answer to "the Great Pumpkin Objection."

9. Alston (Readings 20 and 21). What are what William Alston calls "M-beliefs"? Explain Alston's defense of the claim that these M-beliefs have an epistemic status "importantly analogous" to that of perceptual beliefs. Explain the position DeRose calls "Direct Warrant Realism". Critically assess Alston's argument in light of the criticism DeRose bases on Direct Warrant Realism, explaining how Alston's defense stands up, and defending your answer.