

## Ph.D. General Examination

### Epistemology

**Directions:** The exam lasts four hours. Answer four questions. Answer at least one question from each of the sections.

#### I.

1. Carefully and clearly articulate the coherence theory of justification. Use either Lawrence Bonjour's or Catherine Elgin's theory as a model. What are the motivations for offering a coherence theory? What are the major weaknesses of it? What are its unique strengths?
2. There are many accounts of the distinction between internalism and externalism about epistemic justification and/or knowledge. Describe and motivate what you take to be the best such account. Then answer one of the following:
  - (a) What are the biggest challenges facing internalism as you define it? Critically evaluate the prospects for internalism overcoming these challenges. Are there any specific theories of justification that take the approach you defend?
  - (b) Carefully delineate two different sorts of externalist views of justification. Be sure to explain how and why they count as externalist on your account. What are their relative advantages and disadvantages?
3. Articulate a version of the virtue theory of knowledge, choosing from among the views of John Greco, Ernest Sosa, and Linda Zagzebski (pick one). Explain how the theory you choose handles either the Gettier problem or skepticism.
4. It is widely held that acceptance of a "closure principle" leads to a very strong form of skepticism. Explain this view, being sure to carefully articulate what you take to be the best version of the closure principle. What are the implications of denying closure for the theory of knowledge? Do you think that acceptance or denial of the closure principle is more defensible?
5. Michael Bergmann argues that internalism is subject to a fatal dilemma. Clearly articulate the dilemma, and then critically evaluate its effectiveness at refuting internalism.

#### II.

1. What are the motivations behind contextualist theories of knowledge-attribution? There is now a bewildering variety of different kinds of contextualism. Carefully explain

and distinguish the major different versions of the view. Discuss how each of them fares with respect to satisfying the motivations behind contextualism in general.

2. There is some dispute among epistemologists as to whether, when, and to what extent knowledge is valuable. Discuss the contours of this debate. What are the major positions? How do one's answers to these questions constrain one's theory of knowledge? In the end, defend your own answers to these questions.

3. What is the relationship between luck and knowledge? In answering this, address the following questions as well: Is there more than one kind of luck that is relevant to knowledge? If so, carefully distinguish them. Give examples of how different theories of knowledge attempt to deal with the importance of luck. Which of these fares best?

4. The problem of disagreement has to do with determining the correct epistemic response to the discovery that an epistemic peer disagrees with something you believe. One factor that influences the various positions in this debate is whether the testimony of one's peer is taken to constitute evidence against one's belief. Critically evaluate the "equal weight" view about disagreement, highlighting the commitment this view is likely to have regarding treating testimony as evidence.

### III.

1. Conee and Feldman are prominent advocates of *evidentialism*. Describe this view and Conee and Feldman's arguments for it. Present and evaluate some objections to evidentialism.

2. Epistemologists commonly invoke the notions of *evidence* and *having evidence*, but it is not clear what these amount to exactly. Describe rival accounts of these notions. Which ones do you favor, and why?

3. Plausibly, one is justified in believing a proposition just in case that proposition *fits* one's evidence. But what does it mean to say that a proposition fits a body of evidence? Describe some accounts of this notion, and explain which one you favor.

4. Evidentialism is commonly thought to undermine religious belief: the totality of one's evidence does not suffice to justify one's religious beliefs (it seems). Explain this position. Present and evaluate a (or some) response(s).