

Final Exam

Due: Friday, Dec. 18, by noon

Directions: You will write essays in answer to a total three of the questions that I will distribute beforehand. Each essay should be 600-800 words long (for a total of 1,800-2,400 words for the whole exam), and each answer should consist of about 450-600 words of summary/exposition of the material being asked about, and about 100-250 words of brief critical commentary about that material. (Your answer can be, but need not be, structured by having all of the exposition first and all of the critical commentary at the end. The commentary can instead be mixed in at a couple, or even several, places in your answer.) Going over-length on an answer is not a problem, but the length specifications indicate what level of answer is expected, and will guide my evaluation in this way: If you choose which points to cover and how deeply to go into them wisely so as to best answer the question in the allotted space, you will be marked up for writing a fine essay in the little space provided, not marked down for missing points that should only be covered in a longer essay. Crucial to good short essay answers is picking the most important points to cover.

The questions you choose to answer should not overlap in topic with either of your papers for the course, at least not without adjustment or at least explanation. If you want to answer a question similar in topic to one of your papers, send me a brief explanation of how the material in your answer will be distinct from the points you cover in your paper. If answering the question as I've written it will have you covering ground that is in one of your papers, you can propose an adjustment to the question you are answering, which will allow you to answer it without repeating points in your paper. If it looks like the adjustment will make for an answer that will cover good and interestingly different ground from your paper, I will quickly approve that adjustment, and you can get to work. If it is unclear to you whether answering a certain question would be too close in topic to one of your papers, write me and ask.

Other restrictions:

-The capital letter before each question puts it into one of true groups. Do not let all three of your answers be to questions form a single group. Either answer two questions in group A and one from group B, or two from group B and one from group A

-Do not answer both A6a and A6b

-Do not answer both B8a and B8b

Questions

Our first three questions correspond to the similarly numbered suggested topics for the second papers (A1 corresponding to topic 1, B2 corresponding to topic 2, and B3 corresponding to topic 3), slightly adjusted to more heavily stress exposition and explanation over critical engagement. Do not answer any of these first three if you have written your second paper on the similarly numbered topic without adjusting the question so as to allow you to cover new ground here (see the second paragraph of the directions above).

A1. Pick two of Berkeley, Hume, and Reid, and explain and compare the views of the two philosophers you have picked on whether we are rational or justified in believing in mind-independent material objects. For some important difference between them on this matter, briefly explain whose position you think is better, and why.

B2. Explain and critically discuss Michael Huemer's phenomenal conservatism, explaining in particular his views on the nature of appearances, but also explaining the basic claim of his phenomenal conservative, and (here going beyond what we focused on in class, so you will be relying more heavily on your own reading, though I did briefly summarize this material in one lecture) the basic idea of his arguments for phenomenal conservatism. Critically assess Huemer's views in light of what you take to be an important potential criticism of it.

B3. Can a person be irrational and/or unjustified in believing something that they are incapable of not believing? Is there a good and epistemologically important sense in which it can be that they "ought not" to hold a belief that is in that way beyond their control? Explain and compare the views of Wolterstorff and Greco on these matters, and briefly explain and defend what you take to be the correct answer to these questions.

The questions that remain do not correspond to suggested topics for the second papers, but they are also subject to the restriction and guidelines of the second paragraph of the general directions at the top of this sheet.

A4. Explain and compare how Descartes and Berkeley would answer this question: How can I best tell whether I am experiencing a real computer keyboard right now, or am just dreaming that I'm experiencing the keyboard? For Berkeley, what is it for the keyboard to be a "real thing"—i.e., what does its being a real thing consist in? Briefly evaluate Berkeley's success in distinguishing within his system "real things" from dreamt and imagined things.

B5. Briefly explain what “M-beliefs” are for Alston, then explain at a bit greater length the basics of the argument Alston gives for the conclusion that it is “just as rational to take Christian experience to provide prima facie justification for M-beliefs as it is to take sense experience to provide prima facie justification for perceptual beliefs,” and then explain basic idea behind my critique of Alston in the last section of “Direct Warrant Realism.” Critically assess Alston’s position.

A6a. In what way, according to Hume, do the ideas one is capable of having relate to the impressions one has had? What arguments does Hume give for this claim? How would/does Reid respond to these arguments? Are Hume’s arguments successful? Are Reid’s responses successful? Explain and defend your answer.

A6b. In what way, according to Hume, do the ideas one is capable of having relate to the impressions one has had? How does Hume’s view on that matter guide how he arrives at his definitions of cause in section 7 of the Enquiry? What are his definitions of cause? Does he find them adequate? Does he arrive at an adequate account of causation, or at least as adequate as one can get? Briefly explain or defend your answer.

A7. According to Reid, a certain kind of sensation of touch is needed for us to acquire the “conception of hardness” and the occurrence of such a sensation often produces in us a justified belief that we are in contact with a hard material object. A skeptic might claim that, for all we know, and for all that we are justified in believing, this belief (in the existence of a hard material object) that we typically form on the occasion of having such sensations is false. Explain and evaluate Reid’s response to such a skeptic.

B8a. Very briefly explain the evidentialist objection that Alvin Plantinga responds to in “Reason and Belief in God.” Explain what “Classical Foundationalism” is, how Plantinga thinks the evidentialist objection is rooted in Classical Foundationalism, and, briefly, Plantinga’s attack on Classical Foundationalism. Briefly evaluate Plantinga’s response to the evidentialist objection.

B8b. Briefly explain “the Great Pumpkin objection” that Plantinga answers in our reading, and then explain evaluate Plantinga’s response to the objection. (You may, but need not, use and/or discuss my discussion of Plantinga at <https://campuspress.yale.edu/keithderose/voodoo-epistemology/> in answering. Use it iff it helps you to give a better answer.)