Phil. 270/570: Epistemology   Final Exam Replacement

Directions: Our final has become a three essay "take-home" assignment. Your essays should answer three of the below questions, which are the same questions that were distributed and were to be used for the final exam, but instead of writing timed answers from memory in class, these are now "take-home" essays: you can use notes and readings in writing your answers, and your work won't be timed or proctored. So answer a total of three of the below questions, observing the restrictions given at the start of each group. Essays should be 600-800 words each in length (the lower limit is just for guidance; but the upper limit will be enforced strictly – I will stop reading after 800 words: this is to keep these essays from becoming too big a deal). Submit your answers by email attachment to keith.derose@yale.edu by 5:30pm, New Haven time, on Wednesday, Dec. 22 (the end of the end of Yale's exam period). Though you will not be writing from memory in a timed format, I will grade these essays by the standards I use in grading normal essay answers in a normal, in-class test, so do not let them become three short papers you have to write. Think of them instead as test answers you get to write in an unusually friendly format. I for my part am prepared for the median grade on these "tests" to be quite unusually high.

Questions: answer a total of three questions, following the restrictions listed at the start of each Group

Group A: answer at most one of these. (So answer either zero or one of them)

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.

Group B: answer at most two of these. (So answer either one [you have to do at least one of them to get a total of three answers, given other restrictions] or two of these). **Also**: Don't answer both of questions 6 and 7.

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?

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 deaparts 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.

Group C: answer at most one of these. (So answer either zero or one of them)

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.