

~BQE Analytic, Fall 2021~

Instructions

This exam tests your ability to read a novel philosophy passage with comprehension and depth of insight, to identify and reconstruct arguments, to critically evaluate the inferences for certain claims, and to expound upon the issues raised therein with insightful analyses. There are four options. Each option consists in a passage and a prompt. Please select any two of the four options, and use the passage to answer the prompt. Be sure not to leave any aspects of the prompt unanswered.

Submission

All identifying information should be removed from the exam (including in document properties). Completed exams should be e-mailed to Kaz Mogi <kaz.mogi@csulb.edu> by or before 4:00pm on Sunday November 21st 2021. You should cc both yourself and the Department Chair, Dr. Nell Wieland <nellie.wieland@csulb.edu>. In your e-mail to Kaz, but only in your e-mail, make sure to include your student ID number. Keep a copy of the exam for your records.

~Option One~

Passage:

The contemporary existence debates over whether mereological composites, numbers, properties, etc. exist are trivial, in that the entities in question obviously do exist. (What is not trivial is whether they are fundamental.) Start with the debate over numbers. Here, without further ado, is a proof of their existence: (1) There are prime numbers. (2) Therefore there are numbers. Firstly, (1) is a mathematical truism. It commands Moorean certainty, as being more credible than any philosopher's argument to the contrary. Any metaphysician who would deny it has ipso facto produced a reductio for her premises. Secondly, (2) follows immediately, by a standard adjective-drop inference. (Adjective-drop is the same inference pattern as seen in 'there are red roses, therefore there are roses'. Strictly speaking, adjective-drop inferences are valid only for so-called 'intersective' adjectives. There is a special class of non-intersective adjectives like 'fake' for which they fail; for example, 'this is a fake diamond, therefore this is a diamond' is a poor inference. But 'prime' is evidently intersective, as is 'composite' and 'even' and 'rational' and other adjectives that could be used in its place in the argument.) Thus numbers exist. End of story. (Perhaps there are no completely knock-down arguments in metaphysics, but this one seems to me to be as forceful as they come.) I anticipate three replies. Firstly, one might reply by paraphrasing (1). For instance, one might hold that it is only according to the fiction of numbers that there are prime numbers. I reply that this does not touch the argument. Yet, (1) does not make any claims about fictions (nor is there any covert fictive operator lurking in the syntax). So presumably this is a way of saying that (1) is false, and only some suitable paraphrase is true. But 1 is obviously true, as stated. Whatever philosophical concerns might motivate this paraphrasing, fictionalists have met their reductio. Secondly, one might reply that the sense of 'are' has shifted from (1) to (2), perhaps (as Carnap would have it) from some sort of number framework-internal meaning, to some sort of distinct framework-external meaning. I answer that there is no shift in meaning. There is no linguistic evidence of any ambiguity in our idioms of existential quantification. Indeed, if there were such meaning shifts then no adjective-drop inference would be valid. One could not automatically infer 'there are roses' from 'there are red roses' for fear of meaning shift. But one can. Likewise one can automatically infer 'there are numbers' from 'there are prime numbers'. Thirdly, one might reply that all

quantification is ontologically neutral, and thus accept (2) while denying that numbers exist. To my mind (and here I follow Quine), (2) just says that numbers exist. There is no gap. Indeed, the neutralist seems committed to the following unfathomable conjunction: 'numbers do not exist, and there are numbers'.

Analysis:

The author of this passage seems to believe that certain ontological debates are trivial, in part because of the obviousness of the inferences to conclusions about them. First, explain in detail how the argument works, and how the author addresses the three objections to it. Be sure to explain in detail how the method of adjective-drop works, and discuss its merits; then, generate a counterexample, and discuss whether your counterexample puts pressure on the author's argument. Second, explore what could be said on behalf of the argument's opponent—i.e., the fictionalist about numbers. (For example, is the argument question-begging? How might the fictionalist infer that there are no prime numbers?)

~Option Two~

Passage:

Almost everyone thinks that lying is wrong; that is, there is a general moral presumption against it. But almost no one thinks that lying is always wrong: most of us believe that there are some occasions when a lie is justified or even obligatory. So, lying is not wrong simply, but it is wrong for some further reason, and so that we should give an account of what is wrong with it. For if lying is wrong for a reason, then it will be wrong only on those occasions when that reason holds. But there will also be occasions when it is not wrong: occasions when the reason either does not hold, or is overridden. If this is correct, it is of great practical importance, as well as theoretical interest, to know why lying is wrong; for only if you know the reason why lying is wrong will you know when that reason holds, and only if you know when the reason holds will you know when it is wrong to lie, and when it is not. [...] Suppose you are arguing about candidates and your interlocutor is going to vote. If she among others votes wrongly, a bad candidate will be elected, and if it is to a powerful office, the results can be serious indeed. But this does not make it permissible to bully or trick her into voting the way you think best, any more than it makes it permissible to steal her registration card and vote in her place. She has a right to a vote: this means she has a right to decide for whom she will vote. In a democracy, extremely poor judgment does not disqualify a person for citizenship. In Kant's theory, it does not disqualify her for the respect due to every rational being. [...] The fact is that most of us do not believe that anyone is an expert about what constitutes a good life for a human being, and therefore our view that people ought to be in charge of their own lives cannot be based on the consequentialist theory that people are experts about their own good. It is, rather, based on the idea that the problem of what is worth doing, worth having, and worth knowing in a human life is one that every rational human being has the right to solve for herself. Interference with that right, no matter how well-intentioned, is in the deepest way disrespectful, and is almost always unwarranted. This is why telling paternalistic lies is almost always wrong.

Analysis:

Why is lying wrong, if it is? One answer is that lying has harmful consequences, but that, in cases where *A* lies to *B* for his own good, i.e., paternalistically, these harmful consequences do not obtain or there are more benefits than harms. What does the author think about this answer? Does the author's reasoning support it? Or is there some other answer in the offing? To analyze this passage, break down the author's main ideas and articulate how the answer is arrived at.

~Option Three~

Passage:

Some 25 years ago, a band of philosophers invited cognitive scientists to adopt a principled empirical division between consciousness (the so-called ‘hard problem’) and problems on the easier (or perhaps hard but not ‘Hard?’) side of the ledger. The latter presumably encompass problems such as the nature of short- and long-term memory, autobiographical memory, the nature of representation, the nature of sensorimotor integration, top-down effects in perception (not to mention such capacities as attention, depth perception, intelligent eye movement, skill acquisition, planning, decision-making) and so forth. On the other side of the ledger, all on its own, stands consciousness—a uniquely hard problem. What is the rationale for drawing the division exactly there? Dividing off consciousness from all of the so-called ‘easy problems’ implies that we could understand all those phenomena and still not know what it was for the qualia-light to go on. What exactly is the evidence that we could explain all the ‘easy’ phenomena and still not understand the neural mechanisms for consciousness? What drives the hypothesis that consciousness would still be a mystery even if we could explain all the easy problems? Essentially, a thought-experiment, which roughly goes as follows: we can conceive of a person with all the aforementioned easy-to-explain capacities (attention, short-term memory, etc.) but lacking qualia. This person would be exactly like us, save that he would be an anaqualiac—a ‘Zombie’ one might say. The scenario is conceivable. So, it is possible. Of course, that someone can imagine the possibility is not evidence for the real possibility. Imaginary evidence is not as interesting as real evidence. But since it is possible, then, whatever consciousness is, it is explanatorily independent of those capacities. Let’s take this argument to be a demonstration of the feebleness of thought experiments. Saying something is possible does not thereby guarantee it is a possibility. So, how do we know the anaqualiac idea is really possible? To insist that it must be is simply to beg the question at issue. As Francis Crick observed, it might be like saying that one can imagine a possible world where gases do not get hot, even though their constituent molecules are moving at high velocity. As an argument against the empirical identification of temperature with mean molecular KE, the thermodynamic thought-experiment is feebleness itself.

Analysis:

The author of this passage contends that an old saw is dull. Analyze how that contention is arrived at. To do so, firstly, set up the basic ideas and inferences that lead to this purported argumentum ex anaqualiac, and then reconstruct it in standard form. Secondly, articulate why the author takes the argument to be fallacious. Is there something wrong with the very idea of a thought experiment? Is there a disconnection between saying how and being so? Or is it instead just that some types of evidence are less interesting than other types? Examinees should take care to clarify what the author is trying to do (e.g., rebut an objection, solve a problem, or instead dissolve one, give an explanation, just invite everyone to a different party, etc.). Finally, evaluate the author’s contention. Can we really not imagine possible worlds where high velocity molecules do not constitute hot gasses? If we could, would the anaqualiac thought experiment no longer be enfeebled?

~Option Four~

Passage:

The argument from queerness has two parts, one metaphysical, the other epistemological. If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else. These points were recognized by Moore when he spoke of non-natural qualities, and by the intuitionists in their talk about a ‘faculty of moral intuition’. Intuitionism has long been out of favor, and it is indeed easy to point out its implausibilities. What is not so often stressed,

but is more important, is that the central thesis of intuitionism is one to which any objectivist view of values is in the end committed: intuitionism merely makes unpalatably plain what other forms of objectivism wrap up. Of course the suggestion that moral judgements are made or moral problems solved by just sitting down and having an ethical intuition is a travesty of actual moral thinking. But, however complex the real process, it will require (if it is to yield authoritatively prescriptive conclusions) some input of this distinctive sort, either premises or forms of argument or both. When we ask the awkward question, how we can be aware of this authoritative prescriptivity, of the truth of these distinctively ethical premises or of the cogency of this distinctively ethical pattern of reasoning, none of our ordinary accounts of sensory perception or introspection or the framing and confirming of explanatory hypotheses or inference or logical construction or conceptual analysis, or any combination of these, will provide a satisfactory answer; “a special sort of intuition” is a lame answer, but it is the one to which the clearheaded objectivist is compelled to resort.

Analysis:

Reconstruct in standard form the argument from queerness described in this passage. Be sure to identify the metaphysical and epistemological parts as such. Motivate the argument’s major premises and then evaluate it for validity and soundness.