Now Test Yourself: Answers

Section 1: Epistemology
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- Plato thinks that true belief is not enough for knowledge. A jury may correctly find a man guilty by guessing. But we would not say that this true belief is knowledge. Something more is needed than just true belief.
- Plato argues that we also need evidence/justification. The evidence acts as a kind of glue, which ‘tethers’ the belief in the mind by giving us good reason to continue believing it.
- By contrast, a belief for which we have no evidence – even if it happens to be true – has nothing to make it stick in the mind.
- So, to have knowledge is to have a true belief secured by reasons.

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Sosa compares cases of knowing with athletic performances including archery. In successfully shooting an arrow, Sosa identifies three key elements:
1. Accuracy – whether it hits the target. An accurate shot hits the target. Likewise, a belief is accurate if it is true. For example, my belief that the Second World War ended in 1945 is accurate (it is true).
2. Adroitness – how skilful it was. An adroit shot is skilful – even if it misses (perhaps because of a gust of wind). Likewise, an adroit belief is one formed by intellectual virtue (even if not true). For example, my belief that the Second World War ended in 1945 is adroit because it is based on watching two documentaries on the BBC and carefully reading a reputable book.
3. Aptness – an apt shot is one that is accurate because it was adroit (skilful). An apt belief is one that is true because it was formed with intellectual virtue. For example, my belief that the Second World War ended in 1945 is apt, as the belief is true because it was formed through suitable research.

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a) Perceptual variation argument
P1 Direct realism claims that the immediate objects of perception are material objects and their properties (such as colours, textures and shapes).
P2 But when we perceive physical objects what we immediately perceive, appearances, can vary.
P3 The objects themselves don’t vary.
C So direct realism is false: the immediate objects of perception are not the same as physical objects and we must distinguish what we immediately perceive, the appearances, from reality.

b) Argument from illusion
P1 When subject to an illusion an object appears to a perceiver to have a particular property (e.g. a straw appears to be bent).
P2 The perceiver is directly aware of this apparent property (e.g. of a bent-looking straw).
P3 But the object doesn’t have this property in reality (e.g. the real straw is not bent).
C1 So what the perceiver is directly aware of (the bent straw) and what is real (the straight straw) are distinct.
C2 So direct realism is false: we do not perceive physical objects directly.

c) Argument from hallucination
P1 Hallucinations occur when a person perceives something which doesn’t exist outside the mind.
C1 So what they perceive exists only in their mind.
P2 Hallucinations can be subjectively indistinguishable from veridical perceptions.
P3 But if hallucinations and veridical perceptions are subjectively indistinguishable, then the person must be aware of the same thing in both cases.
C2 So, from P1, C1 and P2 what they are directly aware of during veridical perception must also be in the mind.
C3 Hence we perceive the world indirectly and direct realism is false.

d) The time-lag argument
P1 The light from distant objects (such as the sun) takes time to reach our eyes.
C1 So what we are seeing now may no longer exist.
C2 So what we are seeing and what is there are different.
P2 This is no less true for physical objects at any distance.
C3 And so, what we directly see are appearances not physical objects and direct realism is false.

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The key arguments for indirect realism are the same as those against direct realism given above, i.e. perceptual variation, argument from illusion, argument from hallucination, time-lag.

Arguments against indirect realism:

a) Indirect realism leads to skepticism
P1 According to indirect realism I am directly aware only of sense data and must infer the existence of objects beyond the mind.
P2 But if I am a brain in a vat, in an extended dream, or there is a powerful Cartesian demon bent on deceiving me, then I would be aware of the same sense data. The appearances to me would be identical.
C1 So I cannot exclude these sceptical scenarios. They are possible.
P3 Knowledge that the external world exists requires that I be able to show that such sceptical scenarios are not possible.
C Therefore, I cannot know for sure that the external world exists.

b) The veil of perception problem: we cannot know what the real world is like
P1 In order to determine how accurate a representation of material objects our sense data are, we would need to be able to compare the two.
P2 But we cannot compare them as we only have direct access to sense data and not to material objects as they are in themselves.
C Therefore we cannot know that our sense data accurately represent material objects.

c) The veil of perception problem may lead to a more radical worry: we cannot even know that the material/external world exists
P1 According to indirect realists we are not directly aware of material objects.
P2 We can only be certain of the existence of what we are directly aware of.
C So we cannot be certain of the existence of matter.

d) Berkeley's use of the perceptual variation argument against primary qualities
P1 The appearance of primary qualities varies.
Berkeley's examples: What looks small to us will look big to a mite. Size also varies with an object’s distance from the perceiver. The perceived shape of an object varies e.g. when observed through a microscope or with naked eye. Different creatures perceive different speeds. Perception of hardness/solidity is different to different creatures.
P2 A material object cannot possess incompatible properties in itself.
C Therefore these perceived properties cannot be real properties of mind independent material objects.

e) Berkeley’s argument that secondary qualities are not separable from primary qualities
P1 It is impossible to imagine an object with only the primary qualities of shape, size, movement, etc.
C1 So our ideas of the so-called secondary qualities of an object, cannot be separated from those of its primary qualities.
C2 It follows that they must exist together.
P2 Indirect realists accept that our ideas of secondary qualities are mind dependent.
C2 It follows that our ideas of primary qualities are also mind dependent.

f) Berkeley’s ‘Master’ argument
P1 Indirect realists are committed to the existence of mind-independent material objects.
P2 But any attempt to conceive of such an object necessarily involves conceiving of it or bringing it into one’s mind.
C1 Therefore it is impossible to conceive of a material object and indirect realism is incoherent.

g) Berkeley’s ‘likeness principle’
P1 According to indirect realism we do not directly perceive material objects but our ideas/sense data resemble material objects.
P2 But to say that an idea resembles what is not an idea is like saying something visible can resemble something invisible, or that a sound can resemble what is not a sound.
C1 So ideas cannot resemble material objects.

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This is how Berkeley defends the principle that ideas cannot resemble what is not an idea in Dialogue 1:

‘How then is it possible that things perpetually fleeting and variable as our ideas should be copies or images of anything fixed and constant? [...] how can that which is sensible be like that which is insensible? Can a real thing in itself invisible, be like a colour, or a real thing, which is not audible, be like a sound? In a word, can anything be like a sensation or idea, but another sensation or idea?’

Here is a summary of the argument:
P1 Perceptions are fleeting and changing, whereas so-called ‘material things’ are supposed to be relatively permanent and unchanging.
P2 Analogy: Moreover, to say that these sensible qualities resemble qualities of a material thing is like saying something visible can resemble something invisible, or that a sound can resemble what is not a sound.
C1 Both premises independently show that what is mental cannot resemble what is not mental (the likeness principle).
C2 It follows that a supposed material object could not be like or resemble my perception of it.
C3 And so the indirect realist claim that our perceptions can represent a mind-independent reality is incoherent.

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Hume divides human knowledge into two distinct camps: relations of ideas and matters of fact.
**Relations of ideas**
- These truths are revealed by reason and concern logic, mathematics, geometry and the relations between concepts. They are ‘either demonstratively or intuitively certain’ and ‘discoverable by the mere operation of thought’. For example, that ‘three times five is equal to half of thirty’. ([Hume’s *Enquiry* Sect.5 part 1])
- The opposite of a true relation of ideas is not just false but is a contradiction. So relations of ideas can be demonstrated or proven deductively.
- They do not depend on how the world actually is. Two and three will always make five. There is no need to check this by observing facts (it would still be true even if there were no objects).

**Matters of fact**
- ‘Matters of fact’ are not discoverable merely by thought and can only be derived from experiencing how the world is. For example, while it may seem obvious that (most) objects fall downwards or that fire burns, this cannot be determined just by thinking. Rather it must be discovered through experience.
- The opposite of any matter of fact does not imply a contradiction. So the proposition that the sun will not rise tomorrow is perfectly intelligible.
- Hume claims that our knowledge in this area consists of a) observing how the world is, and b) generalising from experience (induction).

**Implications for rationalism**
- The rationalists attempted to discover truth through reason alone. In other words, through exploring the relations of ideas. However, because such truths are not derived from observing the world, Hume claims they do not tell us anything new about the world.
- Hume’s ‘fork’ suggests that substantive knowledge (i.e. knowledge that is not simply true by definition) cannot be generated by reason and can only be gained by experiencing the world.
- If true, this would imply that the project of the rationalist is doomed to fail.

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In the *Meditations*, Descartes employs three distinct ‘waves of doubt’, each more radical than the last.
- Doubting the senses. Because his senses have sometimes deceived him, Descartes argues it would be best not to trust them.
- The dreaming argument. If Descartes can have dreams which are just like being awake, then can he be sure he is not dreaming now? This possibility means that any belief drawn from what he is perceiving around him may be false.
- The evil demon argument. Descartes imagines the possibility of an extremely powerful and malicious demon who employs all his energies to deceive him. Such a demon would be powerful enough to deceive him about the very existence of the physical world and also even basic operations of reasoning, such as maths.

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*Locke*
- For Locke, the merest possibility of doubt is not a good reason for giving up on a set of beliefs. Indeed, our instincts would not let us do this.
- Scepticism about the external world may be possible at a theoretical level but not at the practical level. Since the practical business of living is what really matters to us, we should be content with this. A sceptical scenario may be logically possible, but this does not imply that we cannot be as sure as we need to be that it does not obtain.
• There are two types of inductive argument here. One is based on how our instincts tend to behave. The second is based on which belief (about the external world) best enables the practical business of living.

Russell
• Russell recognised that we cannot demonstrate conclusively the existence of the material world, but noted that we cannot demonstrate that it does not exist either. We are presented with a choice – to accept that the physical world does exist or that it does not.
• For Russell, the physical world hypothesis is by far the best option. The existence of a physical world can best explain why our sense experience behaves in regular and predictable ways. For example, an apple lying forgotten in a drawer will appear shrivelled and rotten when discovered months later. In the alternative hypothesis (there is no mind-independent physical object), the apple itself provides no explanation for my experience.
• This type of argument is an abduction – an inference to the best explanation.

Berkeley
• Scepticism often thrives because of the gap between our perception and reality. This gap allows for dreams, errors or demons to be the possible cause of the perception.
• In Berkeley’s idealist view of perception, there is no gap between the perception and the object. There is no mind-independent reality. If physical objects are no more than what they appear to be, then there is nothing that is hidden from our view – no gap between perceiver and perceived – and so no room for sceptical arguments to gain purchase.
• This is a form of deductive argument, but one based on the hypothesis that no material object exists separately from the perception of it.

Section 2: Moral Philosophy

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Mill claimed that the ultimate principles of morality cannot be proven, but reasons can be given for believing in the principles of utilitarianism. His ‘proof’ looks like this:
1. The only evidence that something is visible is that it can actually be seen. Likewise, the only evidence that something is desirable is that it is desired.
2. Each person desires their own happiness, so each person’s happiness is desirable.
3. The general happiness is desirable.
4. Each person’s happiness is a good to that person, so his/her general happiness is a good to the aggregate of all persons.
5. Happiness is the only good (other ends are just constituent parts of happiness).

Criticism: equivocation
• Mill suggests the property of being ‘desirable’ is like the property of being ‘visible’. However, it can be argued that desirability is crucially different as it has two meanings:
  o Sense A: A factual sense, meaning that which is able to be desired (which could be anything – even morally questionable things).
  o Sense B: A more moral sense, meaning that which ought to be desired.
• These two meanings can be seen by considering that not everything that is desired (in sense A) is desirable (in sense B). Historically, owning slaves has been desired by many people, but is not desirable!
• The charge is that in line 2 of the argument above, Mill is using ‘desired’ in sense A (people do desire happiness) to suggest happiness is morally ‘desirable’ in sense B. He is guilty of equivocation (using a term with more than one meaning misleadingly).
Criticism: fallacy of the composition
• Lines 2 and 3 of the argument above might be guilty of the fallacy of composition. If each person wants their own happiness, it does not follow that each of us also wants the general happiness.
• For example, each person might want to win the National Lottery, but each person does not want everyone to win the lottery this week.

Criticism: mystical being
In line 4 of the argument above Mill claims general happiness is desirable to the aggregate of people. But the aggregate of people is not the sort of thing that has desires.

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Singer’s argument (from marginal cases) might be summarised as follows:
P1 If only humans have moral status, there must be some special quality that all humans share.
P2 All human-specific possibilities for such a quality will be a quality that some humans lack (for example, intelligence).
P3 The only possible candidates will be qualities that other animals have too.
C Therefore, we cannot argue that only human beings deserve moral status.

Peter Singer argues that the basis for moral equality is our sentience, our common ability to feel pain and pleasure. He argues that as animals are also sentient, we should also take their interests into account. To not do so would be an example of speciesism (treating species differently for no good reason).

Preference utilitarianism and eating animals
• For a preference utilitarian, what makes killing humans morally wrong is not specifically the potential loss of pleasure, but that the killing goes against the preference of the victim (and the victim’s family and friends etc.).
• Staying alive is (generally) the strongest preference that anyone has.
• Also, in killing someone, we are not merely overriding one of their preferences (to stay alive), but also their preference to learn Spanish, learn to make bread, watch all of the *Avenger* movies and so on.
• But this is not true of animals. They are not likely to have a range of conscious preferences (with the possible exception of great apes). We can infer from their behaviour that animals prefer not to be in pain, but animals are unlikely to have a conscious preference to stay alive as they lack the necessary conceptual framework to have such a preference.
• In which case, the painless killing of say, a sheep, does not go against its preference, so is not morally wrong on this account.
• Also, if the sheep was replaced by a lamb then the total amount of sheep pleasure in the world remains the same.
• So, eating animals might be morally acceptable as long as the animal was not suffering during its lifetime and death.

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Quote: ‘If a man shoots his dog because the animal is no longer capable of service, he does not fail in his duty to the dog, for the dog cannot judge, but his act is inhuman and damages in himself that humanity which it is his duty to show towards mankind.’

• Kant argues that being cruel to animals may damage your humanity and make you less likely to treat others morally (as autonomous beings).
Kant believes that we have a *perfect duty* to treat each other as ends, not as means. This means we have a *perfect duty* to encourage our own ability to treat each other as ends, as autonomous beings. Kant thinks this entails that we have an *imperfect* duty to sympathise with the suffering of other creatures and to ‘cultivate the compassionate natural (aesthetic) feelings in us’. Cruelly shooting a dog may make us less compassionate to others, and less likely to treat others as beings with their own ends, so we have an imperfect duty not to do it.

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1. Circularity means that a definition of a term is given which itself contains terms that refer back to the term being defined, meaning that the definition is uninformative.
2. Aristotle’s account of virtue appears to be circular as he tells us that a ‘virtuous action’ is one done by a ‘virtuous person’. But if we want to know what a virtuous person is, then we should look for those people who perform virtuous acts.
3. However, in his book the Ethics Aristotle gives much more detail than this simplistic account, which means the circularity can be avoided.
4. For example, a ‘virtuous person’ can be recognised as someone who is flourishing and living the good life (*eudaimonia*), and who possesses a wide range of virtues, including both excellence of character and practical wisdom, which they have developed through practice and habit and which now bring them pleasure.
5. And if we want to know what a ‘virtuous action is’ then Aristotle explains in the Ethics that these are actions which result from careful deliberation and choice; these actions are in a mean between an excessive or a deficient response (although they are not ‘moderate’ actions); and they are the right or most appropriate actions to take in those particular circumstances.

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1. Some people might argue that there is nothing wrong with eating meat, on the grounds that it’s part of our evolutionary history, as evidenced by the design of our teeth and digestive systems.
2. We can present this argument formally as follows:
   
   P1 Humans have always eaten animals.
   
   P2 Humans have evolved to digest meat.
   
   C Therefore humans should continue to eat animals.

3. There is a hidden premise in this argument namely:
   
   P3 The actions that humans have always done are actions that they should continue to do.

4. But this argument violates Hume’s Law, i.e. the argument derives an ought from an is or illegitimately infers a value judgement on the basis of facts alone. The fact that human beings have evolved to eat meat and that they have done this for millennia does not entail that they ought to eat meat. The point could be expressed by pointing out that the argument is only valid if we include a hidden premise to the effect that the actions that humans have always done are actions that they should continue to do. But this claim is false as can be seen from the fact that there are many actions that we have engaged in throughout human history which are not for that reason morally good, such as theft and murder.

5. If Hume is correct, and we cannot say that just because something ‘is’ the case that therefore it ‘ought’ to be the case, then the argument above (P1 to C) fails. Just because humans have always eaten meat, doesn’t mean that we should eat meat – after all there are vegetables and other forms
of protein which enable humans to live and thrive, and which don’t lead to the deaths of billions of animals each year.

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1. Mackie’s meta-ethical observations potentially undermine discussions within practical ethics.
2. Ethical discussions about whether it is wrong to eat animals draw on more fundamental principles within normative ethics such as whether it is wrong to act in a way that increases pain and suffering, or in a way that is cruel, or in a way that fails to be compassionate, or in a way that is full of greed.
3. The discussions then proceed to apply these principles to the issue: does eating animals result in suffering? Is the intensive/industrial farming of animals cruel? Is eating unnecessary amounts of meat a failure of compassion and an indication of greed?
4. Mackie observes that moral codes vary from society to society, because morality is a product of each society morality is not absolute, it is relative. He goes on to conclude that moral judgements make claims about the world that are always false.
5. If Mackie is correct, then this explains why there is disagreement about the issue. Some people in societies where food is plentiful can choose to be vegetarians, and condemn meat-eating as wrong. But historically, most societies have not had this luxury and traditionally have judged meat-eating to be morally permissible. So, for Mackie, differences of moral judgement about eating animals are determined by different ways of life, and different moral codes.
6. So, if Mackie is correct then there cannot be a conclusive agreement about the issue of whether eating animals is wrong, because there is nothing (no objective moral facts) to agree about. Mackie is an anti-realist.
7. However, even within a framework of moral anti-realism, or moral relativism, there can still be meaningful ethical discussion: for example about whether/how much animals do feel pain and suffering during processes of intensive or other forms of farming; or about the health or environmental costs of eating meat.