Midterm exam guide

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Format

The midterm exam will consist of four questions from the following list. On the exam, you will answer three of these four.

For each of the three questions you answer, you should do the following three things:

(1) Say what you think the correct answer to the question is.

(2) Give what you think is the strongest argument in favor of that answer.

(3) Say what you think is the strongest objection to your answer, and why in the end you do not find it convincing.

You will have the usual class period (50 minutes) to complete the exam.

The questions

1. Does God exist?

2. Are causal chains which are infinite in both directions possible?

3. Is the principle of sufficient reason true?

4. Imagine that you are an agnostic, who thinks that there is a 50% chance that God exists and a 50% chance that God does not exist. Should the fine-tuning argument convince you that it is more likely than not that God does exist?

5. Does the good of free will explain why an omnipotent and perfectly good being might permit the existence of some evil in the world?

6. Does the amount and kind of evil that we find in the world (including evil not caused by human free actions, if such evil exists) provide good reason to believe that an omnipotent and perfectly good being does not exist?

7. Does the existence of horrors show that an omnipotent and perfectly good being does not exist?

8. Do human beings have free will?

9. Is your having free will consistent with their being truths now about every action you will perform in the future?

10. Is free will consistent with determinism?

11. Do the Libet experiments show that free will is limited to the power to veto unconscious decisions?

Grading

Each of your three answers will be graded according to grading scale on the course web site, and your grade for the exam will be the average of these.

Answers will be judged according to the following seven criteria:

(i) clearly states the author's view about the correct answer to the question;

(ii) clearly explains the premises of the main argument for that answer;

(iii) clearly explains why the author takes these premises to be plausible;

(iv) clearly explains why the author thinks that his or her answer follows from these premises;

(v) gives a strong (i.e., as persuasive as possible) objection to that answer;

(vi) clearly explains why he or she does not think that this objection to the answer outweighs the positive argument given for it;

(vii) in accomplishing one or more of the above, goes at least a little beyond material discussed in lecture and discussion sections.

An A answer accomplishes all seven. A typical A- answer would accomplish (i)-(vi) but not (vii); but in general an A- answer is one which fails to meet one of the above criteria. A B+ answer is typically one which fails to meet two of the above criteria, or egregiously fails to meet one. A B answer is one which fails to meet three of the above criteria, or fails to meet two, one of which it egregiously fails to meet. And so on. Obviously, meeting or failing to meet these criteria is a matter of degree, and we will take that into account; but this should give you an idea of how you will be evaluated.