Philosophy 200: Spring 2005
Introduction to Philosophy
Instructor: Eddie Cushman
September 20, 2005

List of Topics for Paper #2 (Revised)

• Write a paper on *one* of the following topics.
• Length: 1.5 pages *maximum*. (12-point font, double-spaced, and no fiddling with margins.)
• Due in my Eliot mailbox by 4pm on Friday, September 30.[1]

Note: All of the following topics concern *counterexamples* to Nozick's account of knowledge. In each topic, you are asked to explain why Nozick's account has an implausible, or perhaps unacceptable, consequences. Topic 3 is pretty tricky. Topic 2 is beyond tricky. It's downright nasty. You might wish to avoid these topics unless you are sure you can nail Topic 1. On the other hand, if you're feeling ambitious or masochistic, you have my permission to write more than one paper. I'll give you credit for your best one.

1. Suppose that you are standing in front of a tank containing 500 black mice, 500 white mice, and one white automaton that is so cleverly constructed that you could not tell it is *not* a mouse without performing surgery. Suppose, further, that the automaton is at the very bottom of the tank. Now, assume that you pick one of the mice from the top of the tank and form the true belief that the thing you picked is a white mouse.
Question: Present Nozick's account of (i.e., necessary and sufficient conditions for) knowledge, being sure to explicate briefly what his third and fourth conditions mean. Explain why Nozick's account has the following consequences:
(1) You know that the thing you picked is a white mouse.
(2) You do *not* know that the thing you picked is a mouse.

2. Suppose that you are drafting a paper on your computer and form the true belief that you know there is a computer in front you.
Question: Present Nozick's account of (i.e., necessary and sufficient conditions for) knowledge, being sure to explicate briefly what his third and fourth conditions mean. Explain why Nozick's account has the following consequences:
(1) You know that you know there is a computer in front of you.
(2) You do *not* know that at least one of your empirical beliefs amounts to knowledge.
That is, you do not know that you have even a single piece of empirical knowledge. Intuitively: You do not know that you know anything.

3. The following plausible epistemic principle is generally know as *distribution*:[2]
(DP) If S knows that P and Q (i.e., S knows the conjunction of P and Q), then S knows that P and S knows that Q.
Show that (DP) fails under Nozick's account of knowledge. That is, explain why Nozick's account of knowledge entails the falsity of (DP. To do so, come up with a case where Nozick's account of knowledge entails that:
(1) S knows that P and Q.
(2) S does not know that P.[3]

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[1] For my lateness and extension policy, please see my syllabus for Philosophy 200.

[2] The reason for this is that (DP) affirms that knowledge distributes over conjunction. Those of you with familiarity with basic modal logic will notice similarities with the modal operator '$\Box$', which is used to express necessity. The similarities are not accidental. Epistemic logic is one of the more exotic, yet interesting, applications of the standard formal apparatus for modal logic.

[3] Hint 1: Let P be the proposition that S is not in a sceptical scenario. Hint 2: The closest possible world where a conjunction ⌈P and Q⌉ is false is not the closest world where *both* P and Q are false. It is the closest possible world where *at least one* of P and Q are false.