Final Exam Study Questions

1. Give an account of Habermas’ theory of Discourse Ethics, making sure to discuss (U) and (D), as well as consensus. Give an account of Lyotard’s notion of the differend, making sure to discuss phrases, genres of discourse, and the differend. How would Habermas portray Lyotard, and why? How would Lyotard respond to Habermas? The very best answers would also include an account of Habermas’ and Lyotard’s readings of Kant.

2. In “Philosophy as Stand-in and Interpreter” Habermas advocates the idea that philosophers should abandon their traditional roles as “judge” and “arbiter” and take up instead the roles of “stand-in” and “interpreter.” Explain, particularly in terms of the relationship between the theory of Discourse Ethics and Kohlbergian moral psychology. In §202 of The Differend Lyotard draws a contrast between the “philosopher,” whose “responsibility before thought consists . . . in detecting differends and in finding the (impossible) idiom for phrasing them,” and the “intellectual,” who “helps forget differends, by advocating a given genre . . . for the sake of political hegemony.” Explain in terms of his notions of phrasing, genres of discourse, and the differend. To what extent are Habermas and Lyotard in agreement or disagreement about the proper role for the philosopher? To what extent are they “talking past” each other?

3. Rorty, MacIntyre, Habermas, and Lyotard all describe some sense of moral progress. Describe each thinker’s idea of progress. Which is best, and why?

4. Rorty, MacIntyre, Habermas, and Lyotard take various positions on the idea of “grounding” morality in language. Explain each of their positions, and judge which is the best.