

## **Suggested answers to the exam in June 2012 on the Philosophy of science.**

It should be noted that the exam is in philosophy of science so arguments for your answer are of vital importance.

1. *Would you characterize the paper as a scientific paper on economics?*

There are two elements to be discussed: Whether it is on economics and whether it is a scientific paper. The paper is on economics as it is published in an economic journal by a graduate student in economics and using economic terminology and concepts. The paper is scientific in the sense that it has been accepted as such in peer review and that it uses precise references and documentation. The paper does not, however, introduce a new hypothesis that could be discussed but limits itself to the description of the work by others.

2. *Would you characterize the paper as normal science?*

This is a reference to Kuhn and his ideas about the evolution of science, see Lecture 6. The subject of the paper may be somewhat unusual but the paper accepts the standard economic arguments and employs standard techniques.

3. *On page 324 the author uses the term altruism. Please comment on the term seen in relation to economics.*

This question relates to the discussion of Homo Economicus being exclusively interested in his/her own wellbeing. Free donation of organs motivated by concern for others would seem to be in contrast to this concept. People do, however, to some extent have social preferences, see the lecture 13 on *Psychology and the experimental method*.

4. *On page 325, the author objects to the idea of presumed consent. Is the objection based upon scientific arguments?*

The answer is not clear-cut. The author suggests that presumed consent would be an invasion of the liberty of the donor and that could be seen as a moral/personal objection. On the other hand, the concept of private property is central to market economies, and the abandonment of that concept would have major implications. In that sense, the objection could be motivated.

5. *The author attempts pp. 326-29 to categorize economists by their published judgments. Is this an established scientific procedure?*

The paper could be seen as an informal meta-analysis, and meta-analysis is an accepted approach, see lecture 9 for examples. Economics frequently uses sociological concepts on attitudes but it could be objected that the categorization is subjective leaving the author scope for manipulation. It would have been possible to eliminate this subjective element by asking other persons to perform the same categorization but apparently this was not done.

6. *The author compares on p. 329 his results with a previous survey. Is this an example of scientific replication?*

The concept of replication has been discussed by the text in Hamermesh as required reading, see lecture 14. One could say that the author attempts to measure the opinion of economists on a given subject using two different methods, and in that sense one could argue for a positive answer. On the other hand, the samples are different as in the case of the author the sample consists of persons who have written on the subject while the sample of AEA economists presumably did not. And it is known, see lecture 9, that specialized economists may have somewhat different opinions than economists at large.

7. *Would you consider this paper to be an example of economics as an imperial science?*

No. Economics as an imperial science attempts to invade the territory of other disciplines but this is not the case here, see the required reading by Edward Lazear on economic imperialism. Neither medicine nor sociology would be concerned with the organization of the market for organs. But it could be argued that economics combined with a consequentialist view of ethics throw a new light on the topic of organ transplants.

8. *The authors notes that some persons including economists find the sale of organs repugnant. Discuss the opposition to sales in terms of theory of ethics by Immanuel Kant.*

In lecture 19, the basic distinction between ethics of duty and consequentialist ethics is discussed. The opposition would be squarely based on the idea of duty: It is simply wrong to deal with organs.

9. *The paper concludes: "Some economists argue that denying individuals the right to engage in mutually beneficial exchange is unethical" (Boudreaux 2006b). In my view, supporting the prohibition on certain consensual life-saving activities, apparently from certain political prejudices or the impulse to signal one's allegiance to certain political communities, is repugnant." In the terms of McCloskey, are you persuaded by the paper and the conclusion? The author does not give the information, obtainable at [Freakonomics.com](http://Freakonomics.com), that sale of a kidney is legal in Iran, the vendor is subsidized by the government with about \$ 1200 and further receives between \$ 2,300 and \$ 4,500 from the recipient. Would you consider that to be relevant information?*

The author's arguments are not very well spelled out so the reader is free to disagree with the conclusion, compare lecture 9 on McCloskey. The information that sale of a kidney in Iran would seem to be relevant information. If the author knew this information but suppressed it because it would put his case in an unfortunate light (Iran is not popular in the US) it would be a violation of proper ethical conduct.