

Paper 2 Topics

Before beginning your second paper, you may want to check out the following resources:

Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Angela Mendelovici's "A Sample Philosophy Paper"

http://prezi.com/z4h1_fwilbxj/a-sample-philosophy-paper/

Topic #1: Choose your own topic. You are not by any means required to write on any specific topic. If something we've discussed in class or something in the reading interests you, please feel free to write about it.

Topic #2: Explain what compositionality is. In your own word, explain as best as possible why quotation and attitude ascriptions pose a threat to compositionality. You might want to consult Pagin & Westerstahl pp. 22-24 and Frege's "On Sense and Reference." Then argue for or against compositionality. Either say that the cases show compositionality is false, and try to explain how that result is acceptable (compatible with the fact that we can learn a language with infinitely many meaningful sentences), or defend some compositional treatment of the cases.

Topic #3: In class we considered several theories of the objects of the attitudes: sets of possible worlds, structured propositions, interpreted logical forms, and Frege's view (the senses which serve as the objects of the attitudes Frege calls "thoughts"). You can do one of two things: pick two such theories, contrast their ability to handle the problems we discussed in class. Make sure to take a stand on which is better, and to say why. Alternatively, pick just one theory, and defend it as the truth. Try to explicitly and carefully state the best arguments available against that theory, and argue clearly that they don't work.

Topic #4: If you believe that the meaning of a word is an idea, you have some explaining to do. Frege presents several reasons for thinking meanings are not ideas. For instance, he argues that meanings must be objective for communication to be possible, but ideas are necessarily subjective. Further, he argues that meanings must be context-insensitive to satisfy the compositionality constraint, but ideas (associated with particular words) are often context-sensitive. Clearly lay out Frege's case against the theory that meanings are ideas and present his alternative view that meanings are senses. Now defend the idea-theory against Frege's objections, to the best of your ability.

Topic #5: In arguing that the meaning of a name is not the thing it is a name of, Frege crucially makes use of the following principle: if name N has the same meaning as name M, and a speaker

S knows the meanings of both N and M, then that speaker knows N and M have the same meaning. But Frege never presents an argument for this principle. In your paper, present the best reasons for accepting Frege's principle and the best reasons for rejecting it, as far as you can tell. What side is correct?

Topic #5: Here are some example sentences on p. 5 of Stephen Neale's "On Location," which you can read here: <http://michaeljohnsonphilosophy.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/NealeOnLoc.pdf> :

- (8) the mayor <of Reykjavík> is underpaid
- (9) most people <in Reykjavík> think the mayor <of Reykjavík> is underpaid
- (10) John is ready <to leave <Reykjavík>>.
- (11) I haven't drunk any wine <tonight>
- (12) the Russian <judge> voted for the Russian <skater>
- (13) <in Egil's Saga> Thorolfur is killed in England
- (14) the <former> hostages were greeted at the White House
- (15) <the woman on> table six wants her steak rare
- (16) every man who owns sheep vaccinates the sheep <he owns> every year.

The way you're supposed to read this is that the sentences are uttered without the material in brackets, but on particular occasions, they can express the same thing as the sentences being uttered with the material in brackets included. So, for example, I could say "I haven't drunk any wine" and mean by that not that I haven't drunk any wine, but that I haven't drunk any wine *tonight*. Neale thinks that these examples show that there is a level of meaning that Grice did not acknowledge. This is because saying "I haven't drunk any wine" does not implicate that I haven't drunk any wine tonight, and saying "John is ready" doesn't implicate that John is ready to leave. So even though these sentences have more meaning than the literal meaning of their parts + context/ anaphora resolution/ ambiguity resolution, the extra meaning they have is not explained by Grice. Suggested paper topic: try to give a Gricean account of 8-16 (or some subset of them). Explain how "I haven't drunk any wine" *could* implicate "I haven't drunk any wine tonight."