

PHIL 43904: Final paper topics

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Due: in class, Tuesday, December 11

Below are some topics for your final length paper. You are welcome to come up with your own topic, though you must get my approval by e-mail first. If you do this, the topic that I approve should be on the first page of your essay. The paper should be double-spaced with reasonable margins and font. There is no minimum or maximum length. The topics below will give you an idea of the sort of topic which would be appropriate. You needn't do any research beyond the readings assigned for the course.

A late penalty of 3 points per day, including weekends, will be assessed for any papers which are handed in late. Papers should be handed in after class on the due date will be counted as one day late. Any late papers must be sent to me as e-mail attachments.

I'm very happy to give you comments on your final papers. However, I'm not happy to write comments if you are not going to look at them. Therefore, if you would like comments, you must include with your final paper an address to which I can mail the paper with comments over the holidays.

If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted under the honor code, please contact me.

1. Explain what you take to be Moore's central arguments against idealism in 'The Nature of Judgment' and 'The Refutation of Idealism.' Should any of them convince a committed idealist? How could an idealist respond to these arguments? Should any of them convince someone who is undecided about the truth of idealism?
2. Explain Russell's theory of denoting phrases. Should this theory be extended to ordinary proper names? Why or why not? Are there significant differences between names and definite descriptions? Consider and evaluate the following two objections to Russell's theory:
 - If I say 'The car is parked on the street', what I say might be true even if there is more than one car in the universe. But this contradicts Russell's theory.

- If I say ‘The person watching TV in this room is antisocial’, what I say might be true and about John, even if John is playing video games rather than watching TV. But this contradicts Russell’s theory.

How should Russell respond?

3. What is the best view of the nature of propositions? Consider the problem of the unity of the proposition and Russell’s objection about ‘false objectives.’ In the end, is there good reason to believe that propositions exist?
4. Make the best case you can for the following theses of the *Tractatus*:
 - There are simple objects.
 - These objects exist necessarily, and no other simple object could exist.
 - These objects combine to form states of affairs, which have the following properties: any one of them can obtain while any other fails to obtain, and which ones obtain determine the truth-values of every proposition.

If these are true, which other doctrines in the *Tractatus* can be derived from them?

5. Give a coherent interpretation of §§6.4-7 of the *Tractatus* which explains the connection between those remarks and (some of) the views about metaphysics and language which precede them.
6. Come up with your own version of the verification criterion of meaning, and defend it against the objections discussed in class. What does the criterion say about sentences of metaphysics and theology? What is the right view of the meaningfulness of such sentences? Is there any sense in which they are verifiable? Does it matter?
7. One of the motivations for Ayer’s view of ethical sentences is Moore’s open question argument: the thought is that if sentences involving ‘good’ are true or false, then goodness must be a simple nonnatural property, and that there are no such things. In the end, is Moore’s view of goodness or the emotivist analysis of ethical sentences more plausible? (You should explain what each is.) Is some third view more plausible than either?