

Philosophy 1760

First Short Paper

General Remarks

Below, you will find a few short quotations from papers we have read. Choose one of them and write a short (3–5 pages, maximum of 1500 words) paper explaining what the author means to be saying in the passage in question (explaining any terms which may be used in unfamiliar or technical ways) and why he says it. Having done this, you should explain, if appropriate, what role the thought expressed plays in the author's overall statement of, or argument for, his position.

As this is a short paper with a defined purpose, you need not worry about writing an introduction, about motivating what you are trying to do, or any such thing. Reproduce the passage about which you will be writing at the top of the first page and then launch directly into talking about it. If you need to introduce or refer to other aspects of the author's position to make sense of the passage, do so. But you should not attempt to explain, or introduce, aspects of the author's position which do not bear upon the interpretation of the passage, and you should not feel compelled to evaluate the position overall.

The Passages

Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually acceptable direction. . . . We might then formulate a rough general principle which participants will be expected. . . to observe, namely: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (Grice, "Logic and Communication")

When we can regard the meaning of each sentence as a function of a finite number of features of the sentence, we have an insight not only into what there is to be learned; we also understand how an infinite aptitude can be encompassed by finite accomplishments. (Davidson, "Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages")

Paradoxically, the one thing meanings do not seem to do is oil the wheels of a theory of meaning—at least as long as we require of such

a theory that it non-trivially give the meaning of every sentence in the language. My objection to meanings in the theory of meaning is not that they are abstract or that their identity conditions are obscure, but that they have no demonstrated use. (Davidson, “Truth and Meaning”)

[A theory of truth] reveals nothing new about the conditions under which an individual sentence is true; it does not make these conditions any clearer than the sentence itself does. The work of the theory is in relating the known truth conditions of each sentence to those aspects (‘words’) of the sentence that recur in other sentences, and can be assigned identical roles in other sentences. Empirical power in such a theory depends on success in recovering the structure of a very complicated ability—the ability to speak and understand a language. (Davidson, “Truth and Meaning”)

A T-sentence does not say that such and such a structural type would be true (meaning held constant) in all and only those circumstances in which it was the case that... , but merely that, things being as they are, this structural type is true if and only if... It suffices for the truth of a T-sentence that what fills the blank has the same truth value as what it structurally designates, and the only sense in which a T-sentence states truth conditions is a sense whereby two sentences have the same truth conditions if and only if they have the same truth value. (Foster, “Meaning and Truth-theory”)

...[R]adical interpretation cannot hope to take as evidence for the meaning of a sentence an account of the complex and delicately discriminated intentions with which the sentence is typically uttered. ...[T]he central difficulty is that we cannot hope to attach a sense to the attribution of finely discriminated intentions independently of interpreting speech. (Davidson, “Radical Interpretation”)