Philosophy 1760

Second 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

It is a platitude—something only a philosopher would dream of denying—that there are conventions of language, although we do not find it easy to say what those conventions are. If we look for the fundamental difference in verbal behavior between members of two linguistic communities, we can be sure of finding something which is arbitrary but perpetuates itself because of a common interest in coordination. (Lewis, "Languages and Language")

What I have offered is the view that one will understand Gianni when one knows what he, Gianni, knows and is expected to know about reference and truth. The general principles and certain theorems of a theory of truth for Gianni will figure in one's knowledge about him. But the theory of truth for Gianni's speech is not something that one starts with, augmenting it with conditions or constraints so as to make it acceptable as a theory of meaning. Rather, truth comes in as something Gianni knows about, and the deliverances of the theory are of interest only insofar as knowledge of them is part of Gianni's linguistic competence. (Higginbotham, "Truth and Understanding")

There is. . . a tension in the usual view of metaphor. For on the one hand, the usual view wants to hold that a metaphor does something no plain prose can do and, on the other hand, it wants to explain what a metaphor does by appealing to a cognitive content—just the sort of thing plain prose is designed to express. As long as we are in this frame of mind, we must harbor the suspcion that it *can* be done, at least up to a point. (Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean")

The error. . . lies in abandoning what is really needed, namely, a metaphorical 'analogue' for literal content, and instead using the word 'content' to designate everything that a metaphor brings to mind. What is needed is something that could *both* function as content in the same sort of way that the proposition literally expressed does *and* capture what a metaphorical utterance seems to mean or to express. (Wearing, "Metaphor and What Is Said")