

# Philosophy 1890D

## First Short Paper

### General Remarks

Below, you will find a series of short quotations from various of the papers we have read. Choose one of them and write a short (3-5 page, maximum of 1500 word) 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

The point is that the word 'fact' [has], like the words 'statement' and 'true' themselves, a certain type of word-world-relating discourse (the informative) built in to [it]. The occurrence in ordinary discourse of the words 'fact', 'statement', 'true' signalizes the occurrence of this type of discourse.... If our task were to elucidate the nature of [this] type of discourse, it would be futile to attempt to do it in terms of the words 'fact', 'statement', 'true', for these words contain the problem, not its solution. (P.F. Strawson, "Truth", p. 141)

Someone says: "It's true that French Governments rarely last more than a few months, but the electoral system is responsible for that." Is the fact he states in the first part of his sentence alterable by changing the conventions of language? It is not. (Strawson, "Truth", p. 145)

Let it be granted then that we must forego any general definition of truth, and let it be granted also that there are certain contexts in which the use of the words 'true' and 'false', or their equivalents, are indispensable. It does not follow that there is any mystery about their meaning. On the contrary, their function is quite clear. ...To speak of a sentence, or a statement, as true is tantamount to asserting it, and to speak of it as false is tantamount to denying it. (A.J. Ayer, "Truth", p. 193)

Let us consider an arbitrary sentence; we shall replace it by the letter 'p'. We form the name of this sentence and replace it by another letter, say 'X'. We ask now what is the logical relation between the two sentences "X is true" and 'p'. It is clear that from the point of view of our basic conception of truth these sentences are equivalent. (Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth", p. 344)

A statement, so long as it is not ambiguous or vague, divides all possible states of affairs into just two classes. For a given state of affairs, either the statement is used in such a way that a man who asserted it but envisaged that state of affairs as a possibility would be held to have spoken misleadingly, or the assertion of the statement would not be taken as expressing the speaker's exclusion of that possibility. If a state of affairs of the first kind obtains, the statement is false; if all actual states of affairs are of the second kind, it is true. It is thus *prima facie* senseless to say of any statement that in such-and-such a state of affairs it would be neither true nor false. (Dummett, "Truth", pp. 149-50)