First-Year Seminar, Questions on Readings

I. Frege, *Foundations of Arithmetic*

1. Discuss the meaning and significance of the three Slogans in the Introduction
2. Discuss the definitions of apriority, aposteriority, analyticity, syntheticity in section 3, and Frege’s relations to Mill, Leibniz, Kant in regard to how these categories apply to arithmetic.
3. Frege argues against taking number to be a property of external things (section 23) and against taking numbers to be subjective (sections 26ff). What are his reasons?
4. Discuss Frege’s implicit definition of numbers in section 55, his objection to it, his objection to the account of direction he considers in section 65, and his explicit definition in section 68.

II. Frege, “On Sense and Denotation”

1. Discuss the theories: that identity is a relation between objects, that identity is a relation between names. (paragraphs 1 and 2) What is Frege’s ultimate account of Identity?
2. What roles does the notion of sense play in Frege’s theory? (esp. paragraphs 2-7)
3. What is Frege’s distinction between sense and coloring (paragraphs 8-11)
4. Why does Frege think that all true sentences denote the same thing?
5. What is Frege’s account of statements about belief and indirect assertion?

III. Frege, “Thoughts”

1. What is Frege’s view of logic? What is the relation between normative and descriptive notions in his account of logic?
2. Explain Frege’s ontological picture. Why does he count thoughts (thought contents) as well as numbers as members of a third realm? What are his reasons for not taking thoughts to be ideas?
3. What is Frege’s view of the understanding of proper names, indexicals (like “today” and “yesterday”), and demonstratives?

IV. Russell, “On Denoting”

1. Compare the view of denoting phrases presented in “On Denoting” with the view of denoting phrases in the fifth chapter of *Principles of Mathematics*, “Denoting.”
2. Explain the first of the three puzzles Russell sets out. What is Russell’s solution to this puzzle? Explain primary and secondary occurrence. using the sentence “the dog is not hungry” as an example. Does Russell’s theory solve the puzzle? How would Frege solve the puzzle?
3. Explain the second and third puzzle. What is Russell’s solution? Does it solve the puzzles? How would Frege solve them?
4. Evaluate Russell’s criticism of Meinong.
5. (For General discussion): Why would Ramsey call Russell’s theory of descriptions a “paradigm of philosophy”? Discuss relations between Frege’s second slogan and Russell’s method and between Frege’s implicit definition and Russell’s theory of descriptions.
V. Russell, “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description”

1. Compare the view of knowledge by acquaintance found in the unpublished paper “Points about Denoting” with the view of knowledge by acquaintance found in “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description.”
2. Explain Russell’s claim that in the case of both particulars and universals, “knowledge concerning what is known by description is ultimately reducible to knowledge concerning what is known by acquaintance”.
3. Explain Russell’s claim that every proposition we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted. Discuss and criticize his argument for this claim.
4. Discuss the relation of Russell’s epistemology to his theory of denoting/meaning, and his view that when we make a statement about Julius Caesar “our statement does not mean what it seems to mean”. What is the epistemic status of denoting phrases, given that they are not part of the “proposition expressed with them”? (Recheck epistemic relations in “On Denoting” on this.)

VI. Carnap, “The Elimination of Metaphysics . . .”
Carnap, “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology”

1. What tasks does Carnap (in “The Elimination...”) assign to logical analysis and verification criteria respectively in showing the meaninglessness of metaphysics?
2. How does Ayer’s account of mathematics and its relation to logic differ from Carnap’s?
3. In “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology”, what is Carnap’s internal-external distinction? What is his practical-theoretical distinction? What arguments or considerations does he offer for them?
4. Assess Steinberger’s criticism of “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology”.

VII. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”
Quine, “Carnap and Logical Truth”

1. What three notions of analyticity does Quine discuss in “Two Dogmas”? What are his arguments against them? What is the other dogma of empiricism? What is Quine’s strategy for opposing it?
2. In “Carnap and Logical Truth” what considerations does Quine cite that purport to say something in favor of the linguistic doctrine of logical truth? How does he defuse these considerations?
3. In “Carnap and Logical Truth” what is the distinction between legislative and discursive definition? What considerations does Quine bring against the notions of truth by convention and truth by definition? Does his discussion of Carnap’s notion of truth by semantical rule improve on the discussion in “Two Dogmas”?
VIII. Mill, selections from *A System of Logic* For Mill (you need only study section 5)
Putnam, “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’”
Burge, “Individualism and the Mental” and postscript

For each paper:
1. In what sense, is the author arguing for something we might call “externalism”?
2. What is the argument?
3. Should we find it persuasive?
4. Does Mill really say nothing about what connects a name with the thing it names, as Kripke seems to suggest?

IX. Church, “On Carnap’s Analysis of Statements of Assertion and Belief”
Quine, “Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes”
Donnellan, “Reference and Definite Descriptions”

1. Explain Church’s objections to Carnap’s account of the semantics of statements of indirect discourse and belief ascription. How do his points relate to Frege’s notion of sense?
2. Outline Quine’s distinction between relational and notional senses of propositional attitude ascription. Why is the solution in terms of intensions superior to the solution in terms of different senses of “believes”? Why does he think intensions are creatures of darkness?
3. Explain Donnellan’s distinction between referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions. In referential uses where the referent does not fit the description, what is the referent, if any of the definite description? How is the referential use related to Quine’s notion of relational belief?

X. Searle, “Proper Names”
Donnellan, “Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions”
Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Preface, Lecture I, and Lecture II.

1. Explain Searle’s cluster theory of names. What advantages does it have over Russell’s view? Explain Donnellan’s objections to the cluster view. How, if at all, do they differ from Kripke’s objections to the cluster view? What differences are there between the child’s use of a name in Donnellan’s example and our use of a name like “Aristotle”?
2. Aside from Mill’s Dartmouth argument, which is a predecessor of Kripke’s modal argument, and aside from the fact that there are differences among what different people would affirm using “Aristotle” and even differences between what the same person would affirm at two different times (as Frege notes in the footnote that is quoted on p. 30 in N&N), what other arguments can be marshalled against the view that Frege’s theory can be repaired by having each user of a name treat the definite description merely as a vehicle to fix the reference of the name.
3. Kripke discusses the following two categories of truth, one is metaphysical and one is epistemic:
   (i) necessary/contingent truth
   (ii) *a priori/a posteriori* truth
   2.1 Give an explanation, in your words, of each of the four concepts in these two categories.
   2.2 Consider the mathematical truth expressed by “2+2=4”. Classify it with respect to both categories and explain, for each category, why it does or does not fall under that concept.
   2.3 Consider now the truth that you would express by saying or thinking, “I exist”. Classify it with respect to both categories and explain, for each category, why it does or does not fall under that concept.
2.4 Assume that Kripke is correct in claiming that proper names are rigid designators. On this assumption, classify the truth expressed by "Hesperus is Phosphorus" with respect to both categories and explain, for each category, why it does or does not fall under that concept.

2.5 Consider now the truth expressed by "The heavenly body that is first seen in the evening is the heavenly body that is last seen in the morning". Classify it with respect to both categories and explain, for each category, why it does or does not fall under that concept.

2.6 Assume that the addition of "actual" and/or "actually" to a definite description rigidifies it, that is, makes it into a rigid designator. Consider now the truth expressed by "The actual heavenly body that is actually first seen in the evening is the actual heavenly body that is actually last seen in the morning". Classify it with respect to both categories and explain, for each category, why it does or does not fall under that concept.

4. Suppose that John, a follower of Frege, was shaken by the criticisms by Kripke that go to the fallibility and paucity of our beliefs. So he checks with his omniscient friend G and discovers that, as he suspected, Aristotle is the only person who was both a student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great. Is he now safe in adopting the student of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great as the Fregean sense of his name "Aristotle"? If so, how has he avoided the criticisms of Kripke and others? If not, how has he failed to avoid the criticisms of Kripke and others?

5. Kripke seems to think that there are statements that are epistemically possible even though they are not metaphysically possible. What would be an example of this for him?

6. The heart of Searle's argument may be contained in the following few lines from page 168. It begins with the words of his Millian opponent:

"... Explaining the use of a name by citing characteristics of the object is not giving the rules for the name, for the rules contain no descriptive content at all. They simply correlate the name to the object independently of any description of it."

To which Searle replies:

But is this argument convincing? Suppose most or even all of our present factual knowledge of Aristotle proved to be true of no one at all, or of several people living in scattered countries and in different centuries? Would we not say for this reason that Aristotle did not exist after all, and that the name, though it has a conventional sense, refers to no one at all?

What arguments can be given for and against Searle's reply (include arguments given in Lecture II)? Assess Searle's reply and Kripke's argument against it.

7. How, if at all, do Donnellan's objections to the cluster view differ from Kripke's?

8. What is Kripke's picture of how the reference of a name is determined?

9. Do Donnellan's and Kripke's points undermine Frege's idea that names have a sense?