

MA Exam in Philosophy of Language

May 2003

Answer one question from each part. Time limit: 3 hours

PART I

1. What is Quine's thesis of the indeterminacy of translation? Why does Quine think that it is true? Assess the cogency of Quine's arguments and the philosophical significance of the thesis.
2. Does the work of J.L. Austin show that there is something fundamentally wrong with Frege or Russell's views of natural language?
3. What is Kripke's puzzle about belief? What is its relation to traditional views of belief and its ascription? How is the puzzle to be resolved?

PART II

4. What is the philosophical significance of Tarski's work on truth?
5. What are propositions? What reasons have philosophers given for and against the need for propositions in theories of language? Do we need to invoke such things in order to understand the notion of truth?
6. What limits, if any, are there as to what a language can express about its own semantics?

PART III

7. What is meaning holism? What are the primary arguments for and against it? What is its relation to confirmation holism?
8. Notoriously, Quine denies that we can quantify into an opaque context. What arguments can be given for this thesis? State and evaluate some representative responses to the thesis.
9. What problems does vagueness present for philosophical theories about language? How have philosophers tried to account for vagueness in natural language?