

Phil 335: Analytic Philosophy
Spring 2008

Take Home Exam 1:
Russell's Philosophy of Logical Atomism

Due *at the start of class* on Tuesday, March 4th, 2008.

From the four options listed below, you are to choose *any* TWO, and for *each*, write a 2-3 page essay explaining Russell's philosophical position, along with your assessment and reaction to it. Although you can always discuss the issues from class with your classmates, you are expected to work *on your own* on the exam.

1) Explain what Russell takes to be the proper methodology for philosophizing in terms of *analysis*. What does analysis begin with, what does it end with, and what is its goal? What is Russell's distinction between simple and complex symbols and how does it relate to analysis? What is the distinction he draws between analysis and mere definition by description? Do you think this kind of analysis is possible, do you agree with where analysis ends, and do you think analysis can help us in understanding the true structure of reality and/or thought? Explain your answers.

2) Explain in detail Russell's distinctions between *atomic*, *molecular*, *general* and *existence* propositions, and discuss the kind of relationship each sort must have to facts in order to be true. Evaluate his position: do you think these distinctions are genuine, and can you think of any problems with his approach? Explain.

3) Explain in detail Russell's account of existence as first and foremost involving *propositional functions*. Explain also the derivative application to *definite descriptions* and to propositions such as "Romulus did not exist." Do you think this account of existence is plausible, and do you think it helps (or hinders) us in solving any philosophical questions about the nature of existence? If so, which ones, and how?

4) Explain why Russell thinks it is most advantageous to understand the objects we normally think about (chairs, tables, people) not as metaphysical substances that endure through time, but as *logical constructions*, specifically as series of classes of momentary sense-data, and how this is in keeping with "Occam's razor." Do you agree with him about this? Explain your answer.

Some hints:

- Make sure you *completely* understand the views of the philosopher(s) in question before you begin writing. Do not "fudge" any part that you don't fully comprehend.
- Write in your own words, as straightforwardly as possible. Do not attempt to sound deep or profound. Clarity is what is most essential.
- Read, reread and reread the most relevant passages of the book for your topics. Go beyond the lectures.
- Avoid fluff. Get to the point and stay on it. Don't repeat yourself, make elaborate introductory comments or summarize what you've done at the end.
- Don't just state your views: argue for them, and illustrate them with examples.
- Don't be afraid to come in and talk to me if you would like additional help.