

Take Home Exam 2:
Ayer's Language, Truth and Logic

Due *at the start of class* on Thursday, April 3rd, 2008.

From the four options listed below, you are to choose **ONE**, and write a 4-5 page essay explaining Ayer'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 how Ayer formulates the "criterion of verifiability" for the literal significance of language, and the importance of this principle for his general philosophical outlook. In light of the criterion, what does Ayer rule out as the proper tasks of philosophy? Explain Ayer's own understanding of the proper task of philosophy as consisting of specifying "definitions in use", and why he thinks philosophy deals more directly with language than with fact. Do you think this is a good way of understand the proper task of philosophy? Why or why not?

2) Explain how Ayer formulates the "criterion of verifiability" for the literal significance of language, and the importance of this principle for his general philosophical outlook. What conclusions does Ayer reach about the status of the "truths" of mathematics and logic, and how does he argue against the position of other philosophers (Mill, Kant) with regard to these branches of knowledge? Do you think Ayer's understanding of mathematics and logic is a good one? Why or why not?

3) Explain how Ayer formulates the "criterion of verifiability" for the literal significance of language, and the importance of this principle for his general philosophical outlook. Explain what consequences of the criterion he sees for the nature of ethical pronouncements and ethical judgments. Explain his own understanding of the nature of ethical language. Do you believe that his theory of ethics is correct? Why or why not? If you disagree, does it lead you to look differently on the "criterion of verifiability", or do you think the fault lies elsewhere?

4) Explain how Ayer formulates the "criterion of verifiability" for the literal significance of language, and the importance of this principle for his general philosophical outlook. Explain what consequences of the criterion he sees for religious and theological pronouncements. Do you agree with these conclusions? If you disagree, how do you understand the basis of meaningfulness (or meaninglessness) of such pronouncements?

5) Explain how Ayer formulates the "criterion of verifiability" for the literal significance of language, and the importance of this principle for his general philosophical outlook. Explain how he uses it to "solve" the philosophical debate over the true nature of the self, and the problem of the relationship between mind and matter. Do you agree with his conclusions? Why or why not?