Internal Critique Exercise

5 pages (1500 words max). Due Mon Oct 31st by 4pm in my office in HUM 361

The aim of this exercise is for you to provide an analysis of the general aims and arguments of another thinker. Unlike last time, when your focus was on one quote from a text, you have to choose yourself the parts of the paper that are the most important to discuss. The emphasis is, however, still on presenting another thinker’s ideas clearly and concisely; very little room will be for you to present your own ideas.

Choose one paper from the ones we have discussed so far (ie Frege, Russell, Putnam, Kripke, or Black). Provide an evaluation of the author’s main claims and the arguments made:
What is the main point of the paper? What is the motivation for the paper? Exactly what is the claim made? Is there an argument given for the claim? How good is the argument? Can you object to the argument given? Can you respond to your objections on behalf of the author? If several claims are made, and/or several arguments are given, discuss the most important ones.

It is a good rule of critical engagement in philosophy to always start with criticism that is internal, i.e., criticism that grants the authors their starting points and looks to see if their position can be made to work, before one ventures to offer external criticism, i.e., criticism that rejects the authors’ very starting points. Your aim in this paper should be to engage in an internal critique of the philosophical work of one of the authors we have discussed so far this semester.

Tips:

Focus: In choosing your topic, ask yourself why you are choosing to discuss the one that you do. Is it the most important one in the reading? Most interesting? Requires most clarificatory work? Be sure to convey to your reader why you have chosen the issues you discuss. Ideally the reader should feel that of course these are the most important/interesting issues in the vicinity.

Pitch: Clarity is of the utmost importance. You are not only trying to get clear on some issues, but also presenting them to your reader. Always keep your reader in mind. Write in plain English, devoid of jargon and convoluted sentences. Remember that more is not better. Do not assume that the reader knows about your subject matter. The essay should be self-contained, such that the reader could pick it up and read it and understand it without being a specialist in the field. This means that you need to explain any technical term or distinction that you need to make your points. It is good to think of your reader as a SF State philosophy student who is taking some other philosophy class.

Engagement: The main aim of the essay is for you to engage critically with ideas that you find interesting. Such engagement requires that you be a charitable reader and interpreter of other people’s views. The focus shouldn’t so much be on what the authors actually say, although that is important, but on what they could say: what resources do they have at their disposal? Is there a way to develop their view that avoids the objections you raise?