

Suggested Second Paper Topics

This is the second of four lists of suggested paper topics. You must do *two* papers for the course; and you may do three and count your best two. **If you did not do the first paper, you must do this one. These paper topics are just suggestions; I am happy to receive a paper on a topic of your own choosing, as long as it is on one of the paradoxes from the last three weeks.** Papers should be about three pages, double-spaced. Papers from this list are due Friday, Nov. 6, at midnight as an e-mail attachment (word file or pdf).

1. We talked a lot about Russell's paradox, but little or not at all about another paradox that challenges our ordinary conception of set and the naïve comprehension axiom: Berry's paradox. For a description of this paradox, see the reading by Pinter, p. 4. First, explain the "standard" set theorists' response to Berry's Paradox. Say why that response, even if acceptable for the mathematician, does not really solve the paradox. Consider how someone who accepted Tarski's solution to the liar paradox would respond to the paradox.
2. One obvious first impression for dismissing the Liar paradox (or the strengthened Liar) is to say that there is something improper about a sentence containing a name for itself – e.g., (L): (L) is false – or containing a demonstrative "pointing to" itself – e.g., This sentence is false. Explain why this is a bad response to the Liar. You will want to consider, first, whether it does too much, whether it dismisses as improper perfectly meaningful sentences that have clear truth values; and, second, whether it does too little, whether it fails to solve all liar-type paradoxes, and thus fails to get to the heart of the problem. Your paper should illustrate your claims with lots of examples.
3. State as clearly as you can what "higher-order vagueness" is. Illustrate with examples. Then consider the three main positions on vagueness – epistemicism, supervaluationism, and the degrees of truth account – and discuss for each whether and how higher-order vagueness is a problem. If it is a problem, then consider what sorts of replies can be made on the view's behalf.