

Metaphysics: Problem set 8

November 27th

due date: December 2nd

Use your own words. No quotation, no paraphrase.

Please type and staple your answers.

Brevity will be rewarded.

1. In *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell gives the following argument for the claim that there is at least one relation:

If we wish to avoid the universals whiteness and triangularity, we shall choose some particular patch of white or some particular triangle, and say that anything is white or a triangle if it has the right sort of resemblance to our chosen particular. But then the resemblance required will have to be a universal. Since there are many white things, the resemblance must hold between many pairs of particular white things; and this is the characteristic of a universal.

Explain Russell's argument in your own words, and consider how someone who denied the existence of universals might respond to it.

2. 'Mathematics is an established, going concern. Philosophy is as shaky as can be. To reject mathematics for philosophical reasons would be absurd... Even if we reject mathematics gently—explaining how it can be a most useful fiction, "good without being true"—we still reject it, and that's still absurd.' (Lewis, *Parts of Classes*, p. 58). Discuss, briefly.
3. Hartry Field presents the believer in numbers (and other mathematical entities) with what he calls 'Benacerraf's challenge': 'to provide an account of the mechanisms that explain how our beliefs about these remote entities can so well reflect the facts about them' (*Realism, Mathematics and Modality*, p. 26); he suggests that this challenge may be insurmountable, and that this constitutes a good reason not to believe in numbers. Explain this argument in your own words, and consider how the believer in numbers might respond to it.