

24.400: Proseminar in Philosophy I

Fall 2013

Grundlagen (week of Sep 9)

1. According to Mill, arithmetical truths are “in reality physical truths obtained by observation” (*A System of Logic*, 28). Explain what Mill means by this, and evaluate Frege’s criticisms of it.
2. If arithmetic is not empirical, it must be synthetic a priori or analytic, in Frege’s view (§12ff). What does he mean by these terms? Which of the two possibilities does he favor?
3. Evaluate Frege’s criticisms of the view that “Number is a property of external things” (§21ff). Why does Frege think that his discussion “may easily lead us to regard number as something subjective”? What does that even mean?
4. To regard numbers as subjective would be a mistake, according to Frege (§26ff). Why? Are his reasons persuasive?
5. In §45 Frege writes: “We were thus forced, it seemed, to ascribe to units two contradictory qualities, namely identity and distinguishability.” What does he mean by this? Were we?
6. In §55 Frege offers definitions of the numbers that “suggest themselves...spontaneously in the light of our previous results.” What are these previous results? Why does Frege think the definitions are inadequate? Is he right?

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