Here are a few topics that you can use for your reading essay due in class on Thursday, 2/7. Please select your own if you’d prefer—that is generally the better course of action. The topics below are not written in a way that lines up with the structure of the essays I want. These statements are meant to get you thinking—simply answering the questions in order will not result in an adequate essay.

1. On pp. 36-7, Soames provides an argument meant to establish that arithmetical truth cannot be defined within arithmetic, thus establishing that Tarski successfully defines truth in a way that avoids the liar. What is the structure of this argument? Does it work? What could it tell us about natural language?

2. On pp. 39-40, Soames supplies two arguments for the conclusion that Tarski-truth will not work as a foundation of a theory of meaning for natural language. Extract one of the arguments and reconstruct it. Can it be rebutted?

3. What does Davidson have to say about the sentence, ‘Bardot is good’, on p. 101? Does he think that this kind of sentence is a problem for his type of semantic theory? Extract an argument from this discussion for his conclusion, and then respond to that argument.

4. On p. 91, Davidson delivers a version of what has become known as the “slingshot argument”. Reconstruct this argument and determine what sort of problem it poses for Frege’s theory of meaning. How would you modify the theory of meaning to deal with it?

5. On pp. 57-8, Soames provides an argument against the Stalnaker-Lewis view of the semantics of counterfactuals. What is this argument? Do you find it compelling? Provide an argument that either criticizes Soames’ position or explores the implications of his conclusion.