Second Paper Assignment (revised, new due date)

Write a paper, following all of the instructions below. E-mail it as an attachment to david.braun@rochester.edu by 5:00 pm, Thursday, October 18. Late papers will be strongly penalized. Please keep an electronic copy of your paper, for your own protection.

Format Instructions
Your paper must be a Word or pdf document. It should be about 4 pages or 1,250 words long (upper-level writing students and graduate students: 5 pages, 1,500 words). It must be produced in 12-point font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides. Its pages must be numbered by your word-processor. Your e-mail address must appear on the first page. Upper-Level Writing students must mark their papers with the phrase “Upper-Level Writing”.

Content Instructions
Write your paper about the selection by Nathan Salmon on the following page. Follow the instructions below.

0. Provide required citations (see the Citations handout).
1. Use single quotation marks to mention expressions.
2. Write your paper so that it can be understood by an undergraduate philosophy major who is not in this class. It should have a standard essay format, except for a displayed argument with numbered premises and conclusion. It should have at least one introductory sentence, and sentences that connect together the paragraphs in which you extract, explain, and evaluate the argument. Make these sentences brief and to the point. Do not begin your paper with a sentence like “Since the dawn of time, humans have wondered about the nature of meaning.” Instead, begin with something along the lines of “This paper critically examines an argument by Nathan Salmon against a certain Fregean theory of meaning.”
3. Describe the theory that Salmon is criticizing. (He calls it ‘the orthodox theory’. You should assume that he is criticizing Frege’s theory of belief attributions. Also, assume that when he talks about concepts and conceptual content, he is talking about Fregean senses. Describe only the parts of Frege’s view that are directly relevant to Salmon’s argument.)
4. Extract an argument from the selection, and display it in numbered premise-conclusion form. The argument should be valid. It may (but need not) have subconclusions. Every simple argument in it should have one of the forms given on the Arguments handout (MP, MT, etc.). There should be no idle premises. The main conclusion must be a sentence of the form “X is false” or “X is not true”, where “X” is the name of the view you described earlier. It would be wise to make the argument relatively short and simple.
5. Explain the argument line-by-line. That is, explain the technical terms (if any) that occur in it, and give reasons in favor of each of the premises (Salmon’s, if he offers any). Write your explanation in ordinary paragraph form: do not number its parts or display it. However, be clear about which line you are explaining at all times.
6. Evaluate the argument. First, for each simple argument in your argument, state whether
it is valid and name the form that it exemplifies. (Each should be valid and exemplify one of the forms: see (4) above). Next, present exactly one objection to the argument, even if you think it is sound. Present the strongest objection to the argument that you can think of. (It may help to imagine how a defender of the idea theory would respond to the argument.) Be sure to specify which premise you are criticizing.

7. Briefly describe how Salmon might respond to your objection.
8. After considering all the argument, the objection, and the reply, give a concluding evaluation of Salmon’s argument: is it sound?

The Author and the Selection

Nathan Salmon is a professor of philosophy at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has written many influential articles in philosophy of language and metaphysics. Some of them argue in favor of a version of the Naive Theory. The following selection comes from pp. 125-6 of the following book:


I have edited the following selection to remove some technical notation and some material irrelevant to our concerns:

The orthodox theory also faces serious difficulties in propositional-attitude attributions where . . . proper names . . . are involved. On the usual formulations of the orthodox theory, the locution “a believes that b is F” attributes to the referent of a belief of a general proposition or “thought”, made up in part of the conceptual content, or sense, of the singular term b. But . . . the conceptual content attached to a proper name . . . varies significantly from speaker to speaker. . . . I do not know what conceptual content Plato attached to the ancient Greek version of the name ‘Socrates’. In fact, about the only thing I do know concerning Plato’s concept of Socrates is that it surely does not coincide exactly with mine. In fact, it is extremely unlikely that Plato should even have had my Socrates-concept in his repertoire of concepts, or that I should have his in mine. I cannot use ‘Socrates’ in Plato’s sense, attaching to it Plato’s conceptual content for the ancient Greek version of ‘Socrates’. I use the name with my own conceptual content. If the singular term b occurring in “a believes that b is F” is a proper name, according to the usual formulations of the orthodox theory it is used there to refer to the speaker’s sense for the name. . . . The conceptual content which the subject of the attribution (the referent of a) happens to attach to b is entirely irrelevant to the attribution. Hence, according to the usual version of the orthodox theory, if I utter the sentence ‘Plato believed that Socrates is wise’ I attribute to Plato a belief made up in part of my concept of Socrates, the sense I attach to the name ‘Socrates’. Almost certainly, Plato had no such belief. (He could not have believed, for example, that the ancient Greek philosopher I first learned about at Lincoln Elementary School in Torrance, California, is wise . . .). [pp. 125-6, editing due to David Braun]