



Week Eight Writing Assignment

Five of you started working on your first paper last week. Your assignment is to continue revising and refining your paper, which is due Friday October 21 at noon (via email).

Of you remaining ten, five of you will begin working on your first paper and five of you will write a response to this week's reading. **The first five students to email me** can take the paper option this time around – I'll send you a confirmation email. (In the event that I don't get five emails, a few of you may be "volunteered" to write a paper.)

Reading Response Option

The ten students who are not writing papers will write a one- to two-page response to the **Locke** article (note that this is a change from the original syllabus). For more on writing a good response, see below.

Please email me your response in MS Word format **before 5 p.m. on Wednesday, October 19.**

Paper Option

The five students writing papers will write a four-page paper on one issue raised by Nagel's article and/or Miedaner's stories. This will be your first graded paper, and you'll be evaluated both on the clarity and quality of your discussion.

Please email me your paper in MS Word format before **12 noon on Wednesday, October 26.**

You must make an appointment to work on your paper with someone at the Writing Center, Smith Campus Center 212. (You can make appointments online at www.writing.pomona.edu/appt.) Writing Fellows are available Sunday to Thursday, 2–5 and 7–10. I'll be asking you to write up a brief paragraph on your impression of the Writing Center.

I'd be happy to talk to you about your ideas for your paper or my comments on your previous assignment. You can come by office hours or email me for an appointment.

Response Guidelines

Good discussions depend on preparation. Before you come to class, I want you to: have thought about the readings; have good questions to ask; have decided what you think about key issues and why you think it.

In seminar classes, professors frequently will ask you to turn in a response to the reading beforehand as a way of helping you prepare. A response is not a formal essay; the hope is that just the process of writing down your reaction to a reading will help you clarify and organize your thoughts and questions. E.g., when you try to describe what Locke means when he says that only *human* justice punishes the sleepwalker and awake person alike, you'll find yourself wondering whether you really agree with him. That will generate questions; as you try to answer these questions for yourself, you'll clarify your own view on the matter, and try to think how you might defend your own take on the issue. Etc.

Our next topic is personal identity. I want you to focus on what Locke says about identity of *persons*, but, beyond that, what you talk about in the response is up to you. I get a sense of how much you understand the material based on what you issues you choose to discuss and what questions you raise. A better response will get at some central issues raised by the reading and raise interesting questions for discussion.

Here are some questions to help you get a handle on Locke's view:

- What in Locke's view does personal identity consist in? What does he mean by the line:
 "...and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person" (§9).
- Why doesn't personal identity require identity of substance?
- Let's suppose that I encounter two different souls on two different occasions. Would Locke agree or disagree with the following claim: it is possible that I encountered the same person on these two occasions?
- Let's suppose that I encounter one and the same soul on two different occasions. Would Locke agree or disagree with the following claim: it is possible that I encountered two different people?
- What's the point of the Nestor-Thersites example? What's the point of the prune cobbler case?
- What is Locke's point in the following lines?
 "God will not, by a fatal error of theirs, transfer from one to another that consciousness which draws reward or punishment with it" (§13).

 But in the Great Day, wherein the secrets of all hearts shall be laid open, it may be reasonable to think, no one shall be made to answer for what he knows nothing of, but shall receive his doom, his conscience accusing or excusing him" (§22).

Remember, the point of the response is not to answer all the above questions. Answering the above questions should help you **understand** Locke's view. My hope is that once you understand the view, you'll have interesting things to say in response.

Paper Guidelines

An important part of writing a good paper is choosing a provocative thesis worth defending. If your thesis is simply that no two people have *exactly* the same experiences, then your paper won't be terribly appealing. Who's going to disagree with you?

So you should think carefully about what you want to say and how you want to defend your thesis. You could refine an argument from your Nagel/Miedaner response. You might also begin by thinking about some of the questions we raised in class.

In your paper, I would like you to discuss whether Nagel would **agree** or **disagree** with your thesis. To do this, you'll need to carefully consider what Nagel says (i.e., it's not enough to work from a general impression of Nagel's view). Nagel might not even be entirely consistent on the matter. Are there places in the text where he seems to agree, but other places where he seems to disagree?

Describing a View

Before you can critically discuss a view or an argument, you need to explain the view or argument to your reader. Your critical discussion will make much more sense if your explanation is **clear** and **precise**. If you give only a *rough idea* of the view or argument, it will likely be harder for your reader to assess whether your critical remarks hit the target.

In many cases the author does not present the view and argument all in one place, or in the clearest way possible. You are *extracting* the view and argument from the reading; this is not necessarily the same task as summarizing the entire article from beginning to end. Sometimes the author won't even present the entire argument – you may have to fill in missing steps.

Audience

The intended audience for your paper is not myself, nor the other students in the class — you know we are familiar with the positions under consideration and the vocabulary in which they are stated. Your aim is rather to make your argument easily understandable to someone relatively *unfamiliar* with the material. Pretend your reader is another Pomona freshman who switched into our ID1.

Philosophical Terms

Some ordinary terms have acquired very specific meanings in philosophy. For example, in our discussion of arguments we discussed what it is for an argument to be valid, or sound. Some other logical terms and expressions include “it follows”, “therefore”, “thus”, “prove”, “refute”, “always”, “false”, “true”, “begging the question”. Try to avoid loose use of logical language. If you mean to say that a point or a claim is true, do not say that it is valid. Only arguments can be valid. Do not use “thus” or “therefore” or “it follows” to make assertions or state opinions; these words should be reserved for stating the conclusion of a chain of reasoning.

You don't need to include dictionary definitions in your paper (“Webster's dictionary defines 'mind' as ...”). If the term is under philosophical scrutiny, the dictionary's authority won't settle the matter. If it is not a philosophical term, you may assume that your audience already understands the meaning of the term.

There is a temporary ban on the following words: **valid**, **logical**, **concept**, and **idea**.

» Instead of the first two, will one of the following work? *Plausible*, *reasonable*, *legitimate*, *intuitive*, *obvious*, or *evident*.

» Instead of the latter two, can you use: *thought*, *opinion*, *assertion*, *claim*, or *contention*?

Mechanics and Style

Please use a large, easy to read font (at least 12 point); **double spacing**; standard margins; page numbers; correct spelling and grammar.

Do not use quotations, unless you think a crucial claim either is so dense or so confused that it has to be unpacked word-by-word.

Avoid rhetorical flourishes; e.g., “Throughout the ages, humans have been mystified by everything from thunder to drought to the meaning of life. Though we have solved many of these mysteries, the human mind is the frontier of the unexplored.”