Week Five Writing Assignment

Derek has graciously agreed to lead next week's discussion on John Searle's Chinese room article. Your assignment is to help Derek.

Derek's job will be easier if you actively and effectively participate in the discussion. How can you be an effective participant?

1. Preparation — we will put less pressure on the discussion leader and discussion will flow better if everyone has a good grip on what the article says. Read and reread the article carefully, until you can explain Searle's Chinese room example *and how he uses the example to argue against Strong AI* to a friend who isn't in the class. (What is Strong AI? What does Searle mean by 'formal model' or 'formal symbol manipulation'? What is each item in the room supposed to be?) You should also be able to describe to your friend the objections Searle considers and his replies.

I don't expect you to be able to remember all this detail. But I do want you to be able to have it at your fingertips. Solution: makes notes to yourself. These notes can be as detailed or as sketchy as you need; how much detail you need on paper depends on how easy it is for you to remember the moves in the argument. Here are some sample notes on an article about the morality of abortion:

*   Abortion = deliberate killing of a fetus.

*   Thomson grants (for the sake of argument) that the fetus is a person, and person → rights.

*   Thomson argues that abortion <u>still</u> morally permissible.

*   Thomson: sometimes permissible to kill an innocent person (person with "right to life").

    o   Kidnapped violinist case. [You might sketch a few details to help you remember the case. Usually the difficulty is not remembering the case, but what the case is supposed to show and how it's supposed to show it.]

    o   Salient features: X=violinist completely dependent on you; Y=violinist there against your will.

    o   Because of features X and Y → permissible to kill the violinist.

    o   Thomson: violinist analogous to unborn fetus. The case of a pregnant mother also has X and Y. Okay to kill violinist → okay to kill fetus.

    o   …

2. Contribution — While it's good to have a firm grip on what Searle says, Derek will want to hear your critical remarks about what he says. (That's what will make for discussion!) Again, you'll want to have these critical comments at your fingertips, so add these comments to your notes.

3. Precision — Really good questions spark good discussion. It will help Derek if you have prepared substantive and precise (but concise) questions. Raising the very vague thought that you didn't get what was going on with the violinist might be a start – it does introduce a topic for discussion – but it doesn't actually take a stand. A really good question might say, "Well, Thomson seems to think P. But I disagree, and here's why. Do you think I'm right?" For example:

- Violinist case only analogous to unplanned pregnancy? Okay to kill violinist because you didn't consent to operation – you were kidnapped. Had you consented, not permissible to kill violinist. W/pregnant mother: consent to sex → abortion not okay.

For this week's assignment, please email me **your notes** in MS Word format before 5 p.m. on Wednesday, September 28.

Preparing all these notes might seem like a lot of work. It is. But great informal discussions seem effortless because everyone has prepared so much in advance.