



## Week Nine Writing Assignment

We now have three groups.

- Dan B., Drew, Dan K., Derek, and Joyce (D4J) just turned in their first paper. This week they will write a response to Dennett and Sanford.
- John, Dan T., Torrey, Megan, and Mara (TTOPS) will continue working on their Nagel/Miedaner paper.
- Brendon, Robbie, Josh, Chris, Kelly (BRICK) will peer review the D4J papers.

By the way, I hope everyone realizes that you are responsible for doing the reading even if you're not writing a response.

### Dennett/Sanford Response

These are both fun stories, you should enjoy reading them.

What do Dennett's and Sanford's stories suggest to you about personal identity? In the first part of your response, create a matrix to help you keep track of the possibilities.

- Along the top, list various identity statements: Dennett = Yorick, Dennett = Fortinbras, Hamlet = Hubert, Sanford = Hawley, etc. You don't have to list every permutation, just the ones that are interesting. (You can invent new names if you need to.)
- Along the left, list various theories of personal identity: same person = same brain, same person = same soul, same person = same consciousness; same person = same computational structure, etc.

In each box of the matrix, indicate a) whether you think the identity statement is true according to the theory of personal identity, and b) whether you think most people will say the identity statement is true (you might give the same response to a. and b. every time).

In the second part of your response, briefly **defend** a theory, either one you listed or your own, by explaining away a couple of the apparent counterexamples.

To explain away a counterexample is to explain why the apparently "wrong" answer your theory gives to a case isn't really wrong. E.g., Suppose you think the soul theory is correct and suppose you had "Man with Socrates's soul = Socrates" listed along the top of your matrix. Most people, after reading Locke's description of the case, would put "no" in the "soul theory, man with Socrates's soul = Socrates" box. That's why it's supposed to be a counterexample to the soul theory – the soul theory seems committed to putting a "yes" in the box. So if you were defending the soul theory, you'd have to explain away this supposed counterexample in one of two ways:

1. Explain why a "yes" verdict isn't really that implausible.
2. Explain why your theory doesn't commit you to a "no" verdict, perhaps despite initial appearances.

Please email me your response in MS Word format **before 5 p.m. on Monday, October 24.**

## Peer Review

This coming week we will workshop the D4J papers in class; in preparation for our workshop, you will peer review each of the papers in group 1.

- Review Letters on the first two papers are due Tuesday morning, 10/25, by 10 a.m.
- Review Letters on the next three papers are due Wednesday, 10/26, by 5 p.m.

A word of warning: I don't think this is an easy assignment! It is difficult to give helpful, constructive feedback. Vague, unfocused praise (or criticism) doesn't help anyone. Your goal as a reader should be to figure out what the paper is trying to do and how it might accomplish that in the clearest, most interesting, and most convincing way possible.

Remember that this is the work of one of your peers, so be respectful! Everyone has a hard time taking criticism of their writing. You aren't trying to tear the paper to shreds and make the author feel crappy, you are trying to help them their writing.

You will write a roughly 300 word (1-1½ page) letter of constructive criticism on each paper. In class and in your letter the focus will be on global issues: thesis, structure, and signposting. The letter will go to both the author and to me.

Please do offer the author feedback, either in marginal notes or in your letters, about "local" or sentence-level issues: sentences that are winners or losers, phrases that could be improved, etc. (see below). If you make marginal comments, please bring your commented paper to class to give to the author. Only the author will see your marginal comments.

### *Review Letter*

Your letter should describe and evaluate each of the following:

#### 1. Thesis.

Does the author state a thesis? Is the thesis really the organizing claim of the paper? Be skeptical about what the paper claims as its thesis – authors often make arguments of which they appear unaware. What does the essay argue *in addition* to the thesis it claims? Rephrase the thesis in your own words to include these other, latent arguments.

#### 2. Structure.

Outline the essay to be sure that you have a sense of what the argument does and how it does it – see below. Give a sketch of the paper's overall structure in your own words.

Then, evaluate the structure: does it proceed in a logical and progressive order? Does it repeat itself? Do you understand how each paragraph contributes to the overall argument of the paper? Are there gaps in the argument, or parts of the argument that are inadequately supported? Is the author ever sidetracked by issues that you see as tangential to the main argument?

#### 3. Signposting.

In a good paper, the author makes it *effortless* for the reader to follow the paper's structure. A paper without adequate signposting can have a cogent structure but fail to be compelling because the structure is hard to follow. A reader shouldn't have to outline a paper (as you did in step two) to discern its structure. Here are some common signposts:

- I will begin by...
- Before I say what is wrong with this argument, I want to...
- I make this point because...
- I will now defend this claim...
- Further support for this claim comes from...
- For example...
- X thinks that this example shows that...

Evaluate the author's signposting. Does the paper tell you at every stage what's been established so far and what's going to come next? Was it obvious to you at every point in the paper why the author was saying what they were saying? Did you every think to yourself, "Hmm, I wonder where the author is going with this point?"

### *As You Read the Paper*

As you read each paragraph, ask yourself if you're sure you understand what the author is trying to say.

- a) Is the author assuming that you already know the topic?
- b) Are there sentences that don't really make sense until after you've read down a bit further?
- c) If the author is explaining a position, distinction, argument, or problem, is it easy to understand the explanation, or follow the reasoning?
- d) Do you understand the point of the paragraph? Do you see how this paragraph fits into the paper as a whole?

For this assignment you do not need to have to give sentence-level feedback. But you are certainly welcome to offer constructive marginal suggestions. This is (I think) very difficult to do.

- On the one hand, you are not rewriting their paper for them. Nobody wants to get a paper back from a friend in which every sentence is changed.
- On the other hand, it's not very helpful to have a sentence or passage simply marked with 'I don't get it' or a question mark. The author wants to know what's wrong and how to fix it.

You'll have to balance these two competing points.

- e) Is there a pivotal word, phrase, or sentence in the paragraph that is unclear (maybe it's ungrammatical, maybe it's awkward, maybe it's ambiguous, maybe it's too vague, etc.). Can you suggest an alternate formulation?
- f) Is there a particular question that you thought the paragraph would answer that wasn't answered? Would answering the question help make the paragraph clearer?
- g) Based on your understanding of the philosophical material, do you agree with the author's take on the issues?

## *Sample Review Letter*

(from Dara Regaignon's English class)

Dear L:

This is a great essay! For the most part, there is a very logical progression of ideas, and your arguments are clear and well supported.

I liked your introduction, and the way you set up the contrast between the OED and Foucault's definition. It was easy for me to see your thesis (Foucault's lens shows that all of Ruthven's seemingly-unrelated power relationships are equitable, and it provides a springboard for a more general examination of vampiric power) and I took your motive to be that by using Foucault as a lens, one could more fully comprehend the way in which Ruthven exercised his power, and why his methodology was consistent, even though the story seemed to suggest otherwise. However, as I was reading further in your essay, I thought that your introduction would have been more effective if it had addressed what you cover towards the end of your essay, when you refute both the OED and Foucault's definitions of power. There really is no indication of this in the beginning, and it was a bit of a surprise when your essay took that direction. Another idea that should have been introduced earlier on was that Ruthven's real source of enjoyment/power (exercising power over his victims, rather than sucking blood). These seemed to me the most important ideas of your essay – the were the most relevant, and the most interesting, and it would have been nice if your intro had given some indication of your intent in discussing them.

The following two paragraphs seem like they could be condensed to me, which is not to say that they were too verbose or redundant, but seems like illustrations of the bigger ideas about power which follow them. They make sense, but I think it would be better if you spent more time developing your ideas about Foucault/freedom/permanence, etc.

I loved what you said about how we takes advantage of his victim's inner weaknesses. I thought that part of your argument was really inspired and well thought through. It was very interesting, and made me want to read further.

Other than more praise for your skilled argument, I don't really have much criticism about he end of your essay, and I have included the little I did have to say in the notes/comments area for you to see. Good job, and good luck finishing up!

Your friend,

M 😊