



Week Seven Writing Assignment

exploring
Mind and Self
ID1§13, Fall 2005

Over the next three to four weeks everyone will write their first graded paper. Five people at a time will be writing papers; everyone else will be writing responses. **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

The ten students who are not writing papers will write a one- to two-page response to the Nagel articles and Lem stories we're reading for next week. You'll frequently be asked to write response papers over the course of your college career. In a response paper, you prepare for discussion by exploring one or two narrow issues in some detail; it might be helpful to take a look at the guidelines from Week Five's "Help Derek" assignment.

Please email me your response **before 5 p.m. on Monday, October 10.**

Paper

The five students writing papers will write a four-page paper on one issue raised by Turing, Searle, and two Hofstadter articles surrounding the Turing test and strong AI. 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 19.**

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; and do be aware that the Writing Center may be closed over Fall Break. 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.

Paper Guidelines

An important part of writing a good paper is choosing a provocative thesis worth defending. Suppose you decide to write on the Turing test. In light of our class discussions, if your thesis is simply that the test fails as an analysis of what thinking is, that's not terribly interesting. We've already catalogued a number of flaws with the test.

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 Week Four paper (the one I just returned). You might also begin by thinking about some of the questions I raised in a recent email.

- What is the difference between simulation and the real thing? What do you think of Sandy's suggestion that a computer-programmed hurricane really is a hurricane? or Tortoise's suggestion that the book of Einstein's brain is thinking? If you think they aren't the real thing, why not? What do they lack? If you think they are, why does that suggestion sound so odd?
- Is a running computer program ever anything more than a simulation? What sorts of running computer programs aren't mere simulacra? (Is, e.g., "World of Warcraft" [thanks Josh] a simulation? Is the program that executes trades for NASDAQ a simulation?)
- Sandy claims at various points that thought requires emotion (e.g., p. 81). What does she mean? What do you make of her remarks about "subconscious biases" (p. 84)? Is Sandy right? If she is right, what does that mean for Strong AI?
- What is your basis for judging that other people (say other students in the class) have minds? What about the Replicants from Blade Runner? Are your judgments justified? What (if anything) would it take to make you change your mind?
- We've covered a number of competing views about the mind (dualism, behaviorism, identity theory, Strong AI). How do we decide who is right? Whose job is it to settle such questions? Who are the relevant experts on such matters? (Is a mathematician/computer scientist like Turing an expert? What do we do when the experts 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 will be another Pomona freshman who switched into our ID1. Assume that your reader is familiar with the Turing Test and the Chinese Room example, but he doesn't understand their significance. I.e., if you discuss you Turing Test in your paper, you don't have to explain how the Test works, but do need to explain what the test is supposed to show.

If you introduce a bit of new terminology you think your reader won't know, you should explain what it means (though you may assume your reader is familiar with the basic logical vocabulary discussed in the next section).

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.

There is no need to include dictionary definitions in your paper (“Webster’s dictionary defines ‘evidence’ as . . .”). If this term is one under philosophical scrutiny, the dictionary’s authority will not 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.”