



Week Thirteen Writing Assignment

exploring
Mind and Self
ID1§13, Fall 2005

I'd like you to start thinking about a topic for your final paper. Your final paper can be on any philosophical topic that we have discussed, read about, or that is related to the theme of the course. Think of this final paper as three (or so) connected shorter response papers, like the ones you've written in preparation for class discussions.

I'm anticipating that your final paper will be roughly eight pages. We'll be working on the final papers in several stages: for this first stage, I'd like you to write up *three abstracts* (a paragraph or so each) of final topics you might like to write about.

As you might have noticed from the last paper, it can be difficult to come up with a good topic; you want to pick something you can discuss in depth, about which you have some interesting analysis to contribute. That's why I want you to try out a few different ideas, to see which strikes you as the most interesting and the most promising.

Please email me your abstracts by 5 p.m on Wednesday, November 23.

Abstracts

In your abstract, I want you to tell me about your topic and where you think you might go with it. What conclusion do you think you'll wind up arguing for? You don't have to tell me how you are going to get there – you don't have to know yet what your arguments are – I just want a sense of what kind of interesting conclusion you think you might come to in examining the topic.

Here's a sample abstract from a slightly more advanced class:

In our discussion of the Mind-Body problem, I have constantly been frustrated by the inability of philosophers to give an explicit definition of 'physical'. Two definitions of physical which are often used or assumed in mainstream discussion of the mind-body problem. Both versions claim that physics should define what we know to be physical. The first theory claims that everything which current physics acknowledges to exist is physical and nothing else. The second theory acknowledges that current physics may be incomplete, and defines physical by what some future perfected physics acknowledges to exist. I argue that there are difficulties with both of the approaches. I then examine in some detail Thomas Nagel's passing remark that physical properties are those knowable from many points of view. Using some results from my physics class – namely the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle – I argue that Nagel's proposal fails as well. I conclude that we have no satisfactory definition of 'physical', and hence the mind-body problem may not be a well-posed problem, but not because we don't understand the mental!

If one of your potential topics is something that you've written about before (in your first paper, or in a response paper), presumably you've thought more about what you are going to say. In that case, I'd like to hear a little more detail about how your analysis will proceed.