

DIRECTIONS FOR THE TWO READING RESPONSES  
FIRST ONE IS DUE ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15.

*Me:* The reading response should be fifteen hundred words on an idea that grabbed you from the readings or lectures.

*Student:* Which readings?

*Me:* The first response is to Plato or Perry; the second is to Sartre, Dostoevsky, or Berkeley.

*Student:* Is it required?

*Me:* To get points toward your final grade, it is. Ten points per response.

*Student:* So you want a book report, an outline of the book?

*Me:* No. I want your response.

*Student:* You want to know how I like the class so far?

*Me:* No. Leave course evaluation for later. I want your response to the ideas presented.

*Student:* You want to know whether I liked them or not?

*Me:* No. I don't want your emotional reactions. I want your thought reactions, some idea the book made you think about.

*Student:* You mean whether I agree with it or not?

*Me:* Not just that, but what you thought about it.

*Student:* But if I agree with it, what I thought just is what the book says. Can I just repeat it?

*Me:* No. Your thoughts are supposed to go beyond what the book says.

*Student:* Actually, it didn't make me think of anything at all.

*Me:* It's never too late to start.

*Student:* Actually, I didn't understand anything.

*Me:* Well, at least write on an idea you want to understand.

*Student:* Like, I want to understand how to get a good grade?

*Me:* No. Some philosophical idea you want to understand.

*Student:* I don't even understand what you want.

*Me:* Shall I repeat what I've said? Cycle back to the top for a recursion?

*Student:* "Recursion"? There you go again. It's so frustrating!

*Me:* I'm sorry. Here are examples of responses written by your classmates that accord with my directions:

Example 1. Idea of common ground (Kendra Curtis)

After reading Plato's The Trial and Death of Socrates I began to look at arguments in a whole new light. Many times arguments

become nothing more than a power struggle. No one becomes convinced of anyone else's point. Socrates had an entirely different way of persuading. His commitment to reasoning and logic had a far more monumental impact. The structure he used of establishing common ground, then drawing the desired conclusion out of the other person made a great deal of sense to me. If all of the facts are right there in front of the person, in the form of premises, they can't deny the conclusion. Socrates was a master of valid and strong arguments. He knew just how to use them to his advantage. I learned a lot from his skills in this area. It made me think of the most productive ways to argue a point. It is only logical to build your argument from things that the other person cannot object to. Therefore, they end up not only believing your point, but also actually proving it with their very own words. I hope that the next time I get into a disagreement with someone, I will remember Socrates's tactics and see how well they work for me. (Etc. to 1500 words,)

#### Example 2. Idea of the discipline of logic (Daniel Rypma)

The thing that has been most interesting to me so far in this class has been learning about the complicated structure of each and every argument brought forth by the various philosophers. I never realized that thinking could take on such a rigid format. A good example of this is Socrates's defense before the jury. His statements are not just random thoughts on why he should not be convicted, but strong arguments based on logic and reason. In order to defend yourself using logic and reason, your defense must sound almost silly at times in its simplicity in order to achieve a desirable conclusion. Socrates's way of asking, at first thought, very obvious questions lends a hand in laying down his premises for a sound argument. By the time he has reached his conclusion, the reader suddenly realizes why those first few questions were asked. It seems almost tricky to me, but upon further inspection, I realized that it is all planned and structured in order to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. (Etc. to 1500 words.)

#### Example 3. Idea of substitutivity of identity (Jason Jenkins)

When I first read about the substitutivity of identity, I was amazed as to its similarity to something that I learned in a math class last semester. Socrates was actually telling an inalienable common truth. This type of reasoning seems axiomatic to me. The fact that it shows up in mathematics and philosophy only reinforces its validity. Last semester I took mathematical proofs. In that class we were given an "if...then..." statement and then prompted to prove it. A lot of the problems required the substitutivity of identity. I never really thought about using this concept in everyday situations, and I don't know why. It is an axiom that this form of reasoning always holds true. It is a fail-safe way of checking arguments [about identity]. Socrates was probably one of the wisest men in history, for he didn't need to be a mathematician to figure out the axioms of rational thought. He used pure thought itself on subjects with more animate features than numbers. The fact that this type of reasoning floats between mathematics and everyday situations shows that there is no bounds to the use of it. (Etc. to 1500 words.)

Example 4. This one is more controversial. It connects two ideas, the idea of examined life and the idea of the appearance/reality distinction. (Anthony Kinney)

I wish to address The Matrix. According to Socrates, "the unexamined life is not worth living for man." I would like to examine the lives of the people in The Matrix, who were not introduced or even aware of the "real" world. The blissfully ignorant, those inside the Matrix, were completely unaware that there was another "reality." The only reality that they knew was the one they experienced first hand. The things that they did affected whether they were happy or sad, alive or dead. This, to me at least, is what reality is. To them there was nothing else, and so nothing else was real.

Take our life. It could be the dream of some other creature and will be gone as soon as it wakes up, but that makes it no less real to us. We still get hurt, we still experience pleasure. We can still die and experience loss at the death of others. So, even if life is a dream to something else, it is reality to us. Therefore reality is subjective.

The subjects in the Matrix believe the Matrix to be reality, and so it is. Those who were "liberated" from the Matrix found a new reality, and the Matrix is no longer reality to them; their reality has changed. If I were one of those who had the chance to be liberated from the Matrix, I would rather stay in it. The reality inside the Matrix was much less harsh than the "actual" reality outside the Matrix, and I'd much rather live that life instead of being hunted by squirmy robots and eating gruel or whatever day after day. (Etc. to 1500 words.)

*Me:* Are those examples enough?

*Student:* Yes. Thank you, Kendra, Daniel, Jason, and Anthony. You helped me much more than Dr. Falk did!

*Me:* These ideas are their ideas. Your response should be your own ideas.

*Student:* You mean I can't just copy something from a website and paste it into a letter to you and say it's mine?

*Me:* That's the crime of plagiarism. The penalty for plagiarism is minus 30 points, probably failure of the course. Don't risk it for a measly 10 points.

*Student:* Ok, I guess I could have a thought of my own faster than I could steal someone else's, anyway.

*Me:* That's the spirit!

*Student:* Here's my reading response. I get 10 points. Right?

*Me:* Wrong. Only 1 point. You didn't follow directions.

[CAN YOU SPOT WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS RESPONSE?]

Reading Response

Personal Identity and Immortality by John Perry

I found the argument of identity to be one of the most intriguing

in the book. The idea of something being numerically the same or quantitatively the same is common-sense, but nonetheless abstract. I thought the Kleenex box and blue river analogy were very interesting. The fact that something can be an exact replica of something else but still different is a neat concept.

I also found the sameness of body = the sameness of soul to be interesting too. Both sides made good arguments defending their position. The innings of a baseball game was my favorite analogy. I really enjoyed how Gretchen defended her point, literally, until death. While I did not agree with every point made in this book I did enjoy identifying with it and seeing their point of view. (Etc. to 1500 words.)

*Me:* Look over my comments on your reading response. I will put certain phrases inside # #, and you will see that my directions for writing responses warned you against this sort of thing. See my comment at the end.

#### Reading Response

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*Me:* All those phrases inside #-# show you confuse emoting with thinking. Stop the gushing. I want you to express thoughts.

*Student:* You just posted my paper without attribution!  
That's plagiarism!

*Me:* I did get permission to post this response without attribution.  
Thanks, Bill.

Here are two letters to the editor of the *New York Times*, published Tuesday, August 10, 2010. They comment on a *Times* article on plagiarism in college classes. They tell those tempted to plagiarize how to think of themselves, if they succumb to the temptation. In the end, the best defense against the temptation is one's sense of oneself:

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To the Editor:

As a lawyer and adjunct law professor who has caught too many law school students plagiarizing papers recently, I fully appreciate your article's emphasis on the legal and sociological aspects of academic-context plagiarism. But one concern here may transcend even intellectual property, copyright law and the Internet generation's concept of authorship: fraud on the professor.

The purpose of journalism and other published writing is to inform, educate or entertain. But the purpose of student writing is very different: demonstrating original thought and grasp of the material. Copyright violations and the concept of author's credit may be only a secondary issue when a student submits a paper to an audience of just one, with no expectation of pay.

Think about that duped professor, up late in bed grading a well-plagiarized paper, haplessly scribbling "Great point!" or "Trenchant analysis!" or just "Yes!" but inadvertently critiquing the thought of some Wikipedia-page writer or author of some decades-old book review. Our professor — whether he awards the paper an A-plus or a B-minus (pretty much the full spectrum in today's grade-inflationary economy) — is a chump wasting his time evaluating the wrong person's ideas and crediting a thief.

Donald C. Dowling Jr.

Scarsdale, N.Y., Aug. 2, 2010

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To the Editor:

To put one's name to language crafted by others is public acknowledgment that the perpetrator lacks all sense of pride and self-worth. Such a thief will never know the deep pleasure, the joys, of creativity and deserves only our pity and contempt.

Richard C. Doenges

Gainesville, Fla., Aug. 2, 2010■