

COUNTERPOINT

MATH 105-6: FRESHMAN SEMINAR: THEORIES OF MIND AND MATHEMATICS
PROF. THEO JOHNSON-FREYD, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY, SPRING 2014

FUGUE IN THE KEY OF ESSAY MAJOR (DUE TUESDAY, JUNE 10)

The goal of this final assignment is to put two of the texts from this class into “dialog.” Choose two main texts to focus on — these can be among the seven required readings for the class, they can be from the recommended reading list, or they can be other texts related to the class (but check with me before using other texts to confirm their appropriateness) — and choose one particular question that those texts both speak to. In an approximately-eight-page (double spaced, standard margins, standard font and size, etc.) essay, explore that question and explain in detail the positions your two texts take; clarify the arguments and evidence those texts present; and discuss dimensions of the question that your authors agree on and dimensions that they disagree on. In a word, put the two texts into dialog. Once you’ve established the dialog between those two texts, enter as a third voice: express (and argue for, with evidence) your own educated, well thought out, and nuanced position on your chosen question. “Triolog” is not a word, but if it were, it would be your goal.

While putting together your essay and studying the positions of your authors, be sure to look at other texts (or at least reviews thereof) by the same authors, at the texts those authors cite, and at texts that have cited those authors. Use (and cite!) these sources as appropriate in your essay. Academic discourse is an ongoing conversation between many thinkers: this assignment asks you to understand, extend, and enter into that discourse.

Your essay should follow the conventions of a standard academic paper: it should have an informative title, it should have an introduction that sets the stage and specifies your position, it should be clearly sign-posted, it should be well-argued, it should be well-written, it should be copyedited and correctly formatted, and so on. I encourage you to seek out each other’s ideas and suggestions about both the content and form of your papers.

Your essays are due by email to theojf@math.northwestern.edu by 9am on Tuesday, June 10. I am eager to provide emailed feedback during any and all stages of your writing, but I may take up to three days to provide such feedback, so plan accordingly.

PRELUDE IN SYMPOSIUM SHARP (TUESDAY, MAY 27, AND THURSDAY, MAY 29)

During the last week of classes (May 27 and 29), we will hold an “end-of-term symposium,” in which you will present an overview of your final essay. Your presentation should last between five and seven minutes. In your presentation, explain the main points of your essay: what texts are you focusing on? what question? how do the two texts speak to each other about that question? what position do you take as a third voice? Give a sense of your evidence and argument, but don’t try to explain all the nuances and details: five minutes is too short a time for more than an overview.

We will not meet during Reading Week. (Nor will I hold office hours — I will be out of town.)