8 Papers of Contemplation

Could all life be a dream? Does a blind person understand red? If Stalin were to return, would he be able to rule the USSR as he did in his own lifetime? College students typically ponder questions of this sort, not just in dormitory bull sessions, but in their philosophy and history classrooms. These questions require contemplation, the act of thinking about something intently. The word contemplation derives from the Latin *cum* (with) and *templum* (temple) and means literally to mark out a temple where augury, prophecy, is performed. In modern higher education the closest we get to prophecy is the contemplation of interesting questions, and writing is one of the best methods of systematic contemplation.

Frequently, instructors in the humanities and in the humanistic branches of the social sciences will assign contemplative papers. In fact, the analyses and reviews described in the preceding chapter are also essentially contemplative papers, with the contemplation directed in each case to a particular book or work of art. The activity of contemplation is central to the humanities. Some would say that this centrality distinguishes the humanities from other disciplines.

The human element is definitive in humanistic writing. The results of contemplation differ from individual to individual. The problems posed in contemplative papers are open ended. The questions dealt with do not have single right answers but instead require you to reflect and speculate on issues. This type of paper requires you to state a thesis or opinion on a subject, but the instructor's concern is not with his agreement or disagreement with the thesis you present, but with the defense you construct for your thesis.

To write a satisfactory paper of this type, you may not necessarily engage in research, but you will be required, on the basis of material learned in the course, to think through and reflect on a problem, to formulate a response, and to present your case with skill and clarity. Since you are being asked to rely so heavily on your own abilities to reason logically and to argue convincingly, you may find that this paper is difficult to do, but is especially satisfying when done well.

William Blake, *The Four and Twenty Elders*, c.1805
THE TATE GALLERY, LONDON

The most helpful way of identifying the contemplative paper is to think of it as lying on a continuum between expressive writing, which emphasizes the capacity to express your feelings on a topic, and research writing, which tests your ability to seek out information and to put it together in some coherent order. Like the expressive paper, the contemplative paper assumes that you already know all you need to know; like the research paper, it demands that you offer reasons and evidence for the views that you choose to defend.

Most of the problems raised in contemplative papers come from questions that originate in the classroom and from assigned reading. Thus, the assignment "Evaluate Berkeley's criticisms of Locke's theory of primary and secondary qualities," if posed in a context in which the class has read and discussed Locke and Berkeley, will require a contemplative paper as a response. But if you have not read and discussed the issues, the paper calls for research on the two philosophers. The context of the questions will help you determine what kind of paper is called for. Similarly, the context will also indicate the criteria for giving an acceptable answer. If you have read four Shakespeare plays and you are asked to write on Shakespeare's view of women, you need not read all the other plays by Shakespeare. You should develop an interpretation that can be confirmed in the four plays you have read and then specify those plays in the title of your paper. If, on the other hand, you are asked to address the same question as the topic of a term paper, you will be expected to do research on the issue, including other plays and what critics have written on the matter.

Finally, the open-ended nature of the questions leads to two consequences. First, you have considerable freedom in formulating your approach to the topic and in drawing conclusions. The questions are almost always those about which scholars in the disciplines disagree. Your instructor may value highly two papers that come to opposite conclusions—if they are both argued and defended well. Second, you must establish and explain what you are attempting to accomplish in the paper, but you must also tell the reader what you are not going to do. The professor will evaluate your paper partly on what you say the problem is and on the criteria you establish for a satisfactory answer. For example, let us suppose that the problem is: "Nietzsche said that the will to power is the essence of human nature. What are the implications of this theory for society?"

This problem can be broken down into the following areas of responsibility. The major question around which your thesis must be organized is "What are the implications for society of Nietzsche's belief that all of us possess, as our primary trait, the will to power?" You will need to identify the general implications of the theory and the general characteristics of society. These are the limitations within which you must work. You are not responsible for certain areas which, at first glance, seem important. For example, you do not have to write about Nietzsche himself or assess whether he accurately identifies the essence of human nature.

"I think he is wrong" is not a proper response to a question that asks you only to describe the implications of his theory.

In the rest of this chapter we will discuss four types of contemplative papers and offer some models of each. In every case we will identify the responsibilities you undertake by choosing to do a paper of that type, and we will suggest some strategies appropriate for each category. We will begin with the least difficult and proceed to paper assignments that require an increasing number and variety of skills. So, if you are assigned a paper of analytic or speculative inquiry, you will find it useful to review the discussions of the first two categories before proceeding.

There are four types of reflective and speculative papers:

1 the paper that asks you to attack or defend an author's view

2 the paper that asks you to compare, contrast, or choose between two competing views

3 the paper that asks you to solve a puzzle or resolve a defined problem

4 the paper that asks you to speculate on the probable or the most acceptable outcome from a given set of circumstances.

These classifications represent ideal types, and there is overlap. Moreover, they call for skills that shade over into one another. The comparison between two views, for example, will require the ability both to defend and criticize. Nevertheless, it is useful to identify the distinguishing characteristics of each type of paper.

Criticize or defend an author's view

Here are some examples of assignments that require you to attack or defend an author's view:

- React to Becker's interpretation of the Enlightenment.
- Attack or defend the view that Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is a symbol of justice.
- It has been argued that the belief in free will is not inconsistent with the belief that human behavior is predictable. Attack or defend this view.

In writing this type of paper it is your responsibility to identify completely and fairly the view to which you are reacting; decide upon your response to this view; decide how you propose to accomplish your purpose; and defend your own thesis, your agreement or disagreement with the author's view.

Getting started Much of the success of your paper will depend on what you do before you begin to write. The prewriting stage is where many papers fail, for writing is too often attempted before planning is well enough underway.

The result is often frustration, which is frequently dissipated only by those last-minute meanderings produced to meet a 9:45 A.M. deadline.

You need a plan. And you need to begin to search for that plan well in advance of the due date for your paper. A good starting point for a defense of an author's view is to clarify for yourself the author's ideas. When planning a paper on Carl L. Becker's interpretation of the Enlightenment, for example, you should begin by summarizing his view of the Enlightenment. (See chapter 5.) Writing out Becker's view is important. Having it in front of you on paper allows you to study his ideas and refer to them as you continue to plan for your paper. Summarizing the thesis you plan to defend may appear an obvious first step, but many papers are unsuccessful because they are based on an incomplete or faulty understanding of the ideas to be discussed. For example, your writing of a summary of Becker's thesis might be just a few sentences, such as:

FIGURE 8.1

18th century not modern. Age of Reason really an age of faith — more like medieval society than modern society. They fooled themselves — were not liberated from the past. See pages 29, 144, 149 for quotes to use.

At this point, you may wish to jot down some of your own reactions to Becker's ideas, but be sure to indicate clearly in your notes what ideas are Becker's and what ideas are your own. When you use your notes to draft your paper, you will save yourself much time if these distinctions are clear.

Before you begin to write, you also need to develop a clear idea of whether you are going to attack or defend Becker's view. You need a goal, and to this end you may have to reread all or part of Becker's *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers.*[1] Take careful notes not only of his ideas but of those arguments that support or weaken his ideas. (See chapter 3 for help on taking notes from a text.) As you take down information, make notes to yourself on why you are recording certain items, whether you feel they are positive or negative, or how you think they relate to Becker's view. Figure 8.2 shows the sort of material you might have at this stage.

1 New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1932; paperback reprint 1959.

Becker's view

For	Against
A lot of medieval patterns of thought in the 18th century	They believed in reason
Nature — God	Believed in heaven, but here on earth
They had faith (see p. 8)	Becker thinks that all these attitudes are medieval — they're not necessarily.
Believed in authority — just not God	Just because they weren't really atheists or objective doesn't mean they're not modern.
They wanted good society a. ideal of service b. morality	
They saw utopia	
Note: These are all like medieval people — they weren't different — that's how they fooled themselves.	Note: Most of his arguments are OK, but he doesn't use them properly.

FIGURE 8.2

Having the arguments in writing allows you to think on paper. Not only can you study your ideas, add to them, rank order them according to importance, and jot down your developing thoughts on them, but you are also creating a written record of your thought processes for later reference.

As your arguments develop you should become aware of what kind of attack or defense is best suited to the author's view. There are, basically, two types of attack you can bring against an author's view: the view is false; or it is insufficiently supported or unproven. The first kind of criticism attacks directly the central ideas of a given view; the second treats the arguments or proofs of a view without necessarily attacking the view itself. To take the first approach, you will present contradictory evidence to demonstrate that the view is either not factually true or cannot be logically true. In taking the second approach, you will not have to show that the author's view is wrong, but only that it is not true as presented. Your emphasis, therefore, will be on careful reasoning, addressed almost entirely to the internal logic and evidence supporting the author's view. You will need to show that the reasoning used to uphold the view is either wrong or does not necessarily lead to the validity of the view; or that the evidence is wrong or insufficient to permit acceptance of the view.

Conversely, there are three general types of defense that can be offered for any given view:

1 You might prove the view by independent arguments. Creating your own arguments, independent of those used by the author of the view, you can add to the case already made. The only constraint is that the arguments you develop do, in fact, provide good reasons to believe the view.

2 You might clarify the view. By cleaning up the language or by evaluating what is important and what is not, you can distinguish between the essential features of an author's view and its nonessential elements. This strategy allows you to evaluate the weight and validity of the objections to the view. Redefining and clarifying will sometimes be the best defense to the extent that it removes criticisms or renders them unimportant.

3 You might find it necessary to list the objections to the author's view and show that they are not valid or decisive. This procedure constitutes a defense of an author's view by attacking the criticisms of that view, even though you do not discuss the author's position directly.

By studying the arguments you have created in the context of these approaches, you should be able to decide if and how you are going to attack or defend an author's view. If these methods of invention do not enable you to choose a side with confidence, you might try pulling an outline out of both sets of arguments. Outlines are best used when you have generated some ideas and would like to impose a structure on them.

Once you have made up your mind, draft a statement of purpose, a plan of what you intend to accomplish in your paper. With this plan in front of you, you can make your notes on how the approach you selected will help you fulfill the plan and what evidence and arguments are best suited to your plan. You may then find it necessary to rearrange the arguments. This rough statement of purpose might appear like this:

```
Attack Becker's view because his arguments don't
support his conclusions.

a. Characteristics he gives to philosophes are
   not necessarily medieval, but can be modern.
b. Doesn't define modern--so I don't know what he
   means by it.
c. He twists words around so that "nature"
   becomes "God" and traits such as "faith" and
   "morality" have to be medieval.
```

or

```
I will defend Becker's view on the grounds that
the comments on them in my textbook (that the
philosophes were rational skeptics) were wrong.

a. Can't look at their words but what they meant
   by their words.
b. They wanted the same things as medieval
   people.
c. Thought a lot like medieval thinkers.
```

Those are concrete plans of action. Note that they contain a perspective to take (the attack is a dissection of Becker's methods, while the defense concentrates on Becker's conclusions). Also, the arguments are listed in order of importance. This order may well change while the paper is being written, but having a plan lets you begin your paper with definite goals. You also begin with good notes to remind you of why you made the choices you did.

Writing the first draft

The process of organizing and composing a draft from your plan is a very idiosyncratic stage. Some people need to write two or three drafts before they are satisfied with the product; others are almost ready to go public with their first draft. However many drafts you do, you should reorganize and rewrite until you are satisfied with the execution of your plan.

Your main task at this stage is to move your ideas from rough notes to connected discourse. Your concern, therefore, is with the construction

of sentences and paragraphs, and with strategies for using written language to relate your ideas to one another.

The best beginning point is to try to get a sense of what the whole paper will look like, what the major parts are, and how they fit together You need a structure to work with. An informal outline or some other vehicle for trying to envision the whole will be useful. If you created a rough outline during the invention stage, you can build upon it; if not, begin by identifying the major responsibilities you have in writing your paper. Here is a sample plan:

I To show what Becker's view is

II To give my reaction to it

III To demonstrate why my reaction is sound.

These responsibilities translate into:

I Statement of Becker's view

II Statement of my intention to defend his view

III Defense of his view.

Remember, at this stage your major purpose is to clarify the relationship for yourself. As you go along, you can rearrange these large blocks until you are satisfied with their relationship to one another. For example, another way to fulfill your plan is:

I Textbook statements about the philosophes

II Objection to these statements

III Becker's view

IV Reasons his interpretation is more satisfactory.

When you are satisfied with the overall order, you can begin to flesh out your outline with component parts of each major heading, that is, the reasons you have to justify your selection of these goals. Here is a sample outline:

```
I. Textbook statements about the philosophes
   A. They were rationalists
   B. They introduced modern skepticism
   C. They rejected Christianity and medieval
      heritage.
II. Objections to these statements
   A. These statements take philosophes at face
      value
   B. One-sided discussion
```

III. Becker's view that philosophes were more medieval than modern
   A. Their rhetoric was modern; they were not.
      1. Words they used
      2. Medieval goals
   B. Were skeptical only of certain ideas
   C. Claimed to reject Christianity, but did not reject religious view of life
      1. Faith
      2. Morality
      3. Perfection

IV. Reasons Becker's interpretation is more valid
   A. He looks at behavior and not just writings
   B. Philosophes are logically products of their own past
   C. Have more in common with medieval people than people today
      1. Goals similar to medieval people
      2. Would not understand today's relativism and lack of direction and purpose.

V. Conclusions

It is time to generate sentences from notes. Once you are satisfied with the sequence of arguments, you should give your attention to developing the relationships between the various parts of your paper. The purposes of the sentences and paragraphs you construct are to lay out your individual illustrations and arguments, and to discuss connections. It is important to remember that you are still writing primarily for yourself, although keeping in mind the requirements of your eventual readers may help you to make choices even at this early stage. But don't allow yourself to get locked into an unalterable plan. If you cannot make the relationships clear, do not hesitate to change your outline until your argument flows from point to point. Your emphasis at this stage, therefore, should be on giving coherence and cohesiveness to your plan.

Take stock of what you already have written. You should have:

- a rough summary of the view to be discussed,
- arguments criticizing or defending it,
- notes on the reasons for taking your stance, and
- notes from your readings and a working outline.

Organizing these notes, adding new thoughts to them, perhaps writing independent sentences that develop from your rereading of them in light

of your plan may suggest to you the point in your paper at which you can most productively begin writing.

Many writers prefer to start at the beginning of a paper and work through. This strategy is possible if your outline adequately reflects a workable plan. In the outline above, this procedure allows you to set up your points, the interpretations you are going to argue against:

```
The standard interpretations of the Enlightenment
identify the philosophes as the first modern
thinkers. They argue (or it is argued) that the
philosophes rejected medieval ideas or created
modern ones (discuss them according to outline).
```

At this stage, you need not pay careful attention to actual sentence structure. Do not get caught up trying to write a brilliant first sentence. Make marginal notes to remind yourself to rewrite parts or insert possible alternative ways to express an idea, but you should not let worries about language usage interfere with the necessity to write the paper through to the end.

If you develop "writer's block," you may need to change the angle from which you approach the paper. Remember, you are free to return to techniques explained in "Getting Started." In fact, experienced writers shift back and forth frequently between planning, writing, and revising.

The key in the drafting stage is to establish relationships, so you might begin writing the most important sections first and build up a solid core to which you can attach the other parts of the paper. The heart of the contemplative paper is the defense you construct to prove your general line of argument. It may be useful to you, in the outline above, to start by developing part IV. The first connected sentences you write might look like this:

```
Carl Becker's perspective doesn't allow him to be
(taken in or seduced) by the modern ring of the
kinds of words used by the philosophes. Voltaire
might have written about toleration but he was
intolerant (find out what Becker means by
toleration--see if I can find an example from
Voltaire). This intolerance was medieval.
```

This example represents a central type of paragraph in a contemplative paper. It contains an important argument with a concrete example and relates explicitly to other parts of the paper, in this case, to the textbook writers who were "taken in" and to the statement of Becker's thesis, which will probably precede this paragraph.

The process of writing, rewriting, cutting and pasting to rearrange whole parts, of drawing arrows and making marginal notes to yourself

continues until you have a rough, but whole draft. If at all possible, you should arrange to have it read by another person because by this time you are too close to the topic and too knowledgeable about your plan to see where gaps or inconsistencies exist. All you are trying to find out from a reader is whether your plan is apparent, if your perspective is clear, and if your structure is successful in executing your plan and proving your thesis. The job of the reader is not to evaluate your draft but to tell you where problems exist. If your instructor has a policy of discussing drafts, take advantage of the opportunity. If school policy does not prohibit it, give your draft to a friend. Tell your friend not to bother with word usage or sentence structure, but to concentrate on the argument as a whole.

Revising Revising is too often thought of as a tidying-up chore consisting of proofreading and editing if time permits. In fact, the revision stage is of enormous importance for the completion of a successful paper. Your draft is an incomplete paper. It may contain some excellent sentences, and you will almost certainly have revised parts while you were writing, but the purpose of your draft was to write for yourself, to execute your plan. Now you need to communicate that plan effectively to an audience.

The consideration of audience is critical to revising. It will help to insure the completeness and unity of the paper. Thinking of the instructor as your audience has certain drawbacks. Students, assuming that the instructor knows all about the topic, may leave out information or connections that are necessary to make the argument self-contained and self-explanatory, or they may deemphasize careful organization in favor of masses of information with the belief that the instructor will put it together. Write your final draft for intelligent readers who do not know about the topic, but might like to—if you can win their attention.

Determination of audience is only one of several decisions you will make. You have a draft. You should ask questions of that draft which will help to eliminate irrelevant material and finely tune the material you use. The primary question to ask of every argument, paragraph, and sentence is: "Does it serve my purpose?" Your purpose at this stage is to convince a defined audience that your point of view on the problem is plausible.

The suggested strategies for revising given below are not separate steps carried out sequentially, but are overlapping procedures in a complex process. We cannot propose a strict order for rereading your draft for word usage, sentence structure, paragraph construction, and transitions. Generally, you can expect to have to move back to some strategies from the "writing a draft" stage just as you did revisions while you were assembling an acceptable draft. We have isolated some revising procedures for the purposes of illustrating useful ways to shape a draft into a paper.

In the attack or defense of an author's view, your audience will expect your paper to present the author's view in a precise, accurate, and clear way, to take an unambiguous stand on the view, to give substantial reasons

for your perspective, and to show how these reasons are valid and sufficient to substantiate your perspective. Readers are product oriented; they are not concerned with good intentions, but with a complete and well-argued paper.

A careful summary of the thesis to be discussed is important for the reader because this summary offers the concrete foundation upon which everything else is based. For example, unless the audience has read Carl Becker's book—and you should assume that your audience has not read the book—your summary constitutes their only knowledge of Becker's view. A finished rendering of your working summary might look like this:

```
Carl Becker argues that it is a fallacy to
believe that the eighteenth century was "modern."
Called the "Age of Reason," the Enlightenment
was, in fact, an age of faith not too different
in outlook from medieval Europe. The philosophes
"demolished the Heavenly City of St. Augustine
only to rebuild it with more up-to-date
materials."
```

Note that this summary captures Becker's argument, presents certain key words you will be using, and reproduces a short quotation from the book, just for flavor.

Tell the reader whether you are going to attack or defend the thesis and how you are going to proceed. It is usually best to let the reader in on your plan near the beginning of the paper so that the reader is able to read your paper with an understanding of your purposes and, consequently, can put your individual arguments into the context you define. You might write:

```
Becker's interpretation is sound. I agree with it
because it demonstrates the many parallels that
exist between medieval and Enlightenment
thinkers, proves that these similarities are
important, and shows that the intentions of the
philosophes are a better guide to understanding
them than their rhetoric.
```

You should also indicate the ways that you are qualifying your approach. For example, you may wish to let the reader know the following:

```
It is neither necessary nor possible to discuss
all of the many parallels Becker draws between
medieval and eighteenth-century thought patterns.
I will discuss only three--faith, authority, and
morality--to demonstrate his thesis.
```

This disclaimer may prevent second guessing on the part of the reader. As pointed out earlier, the contemplative paper gives you great latitude in defining and limiting the areas of your responsibility; if you omit discussion of parts of the author's view, the reader may wonder why, unless you specifically acknowledge the omission as deliberate, giving your reasons.

Most of your attention, however, should be given to the arguments you create and connect to support your thesis. As you examine each sentence and each paragraph, ask yourself a series of questions:

1 Does this sentence (or paragraph) support my main point?

2 Have I related it to the main point?

3 Must I add to it to clarify its function in the paper?

4 Does it contain parts that are not relevant?

A sample paragraph, developed from the draft, appears in figure 8.3. This paragraph carefully develops the ideas outlined in the draft. It supports the larger argument that parallels existed in the thought of the two periods, and explicitly tells the reader of this purpose. It includes a concrete example and relates it to the argument being developed.

The revised paragraph also shows careful attention to syntax and word choice; to matters of standard written usage, spelling and punctuation; and to the subtleties of tone and rhythm—all appropriate and necessary considerations in the revision stage. After the writer of the example on page 185 has filled in the informational gaps in his draft, he has done much more than a mere proofreading for spelling and punctuation.

Central to your concern about making connections are transitions. Your individual arguments may be sound, but unless they flow from one to another, they may not serve your purposes. You do not want the reader finishing a paragraph and saying, "So what?" Since each part of your paper marks another step toward your goal, explain how the step was taken and its significance for your argument. Transitions need not be long, but they must be explicit. For example:

```
Clearly, the textbook interpretation that the
philosophes were modern thinkers is wrong, but
this conclusion does not necessarily mean that
Becker's thesis is right. An examination of his
ideas, however, will show that his interpretation
should supplant the standard textbook
understanding of the Enlightenment.
```

This short passage sums up the conclusion you want your reader to draw about textbook interpretations and gives a sense of direction to the next part of the paper as it logically develops out of the earlier parts.

Like transitions, the conclusion to your paper should reinforce the unity of your argument. The conclusion is totally reader-oriented and

Draft

Drop contractions for revised paper.

Carl Becker's perspective doesn't allow

him to be (taken in or seduced) by the modern

ring of the kinds of words used by the

Choose the more interesting-sounding and specific word.

philosophes. Voltaire might have written

Example of notes to yourself in the draft to be worked out during revising.

about toleration but he was intolerant (find

out what Becker means by toleration--see if

I can find an example from Voltaire). This

intolerance was medieval.

This is a good idea to introduce in a draft, but it needs expansion and explanation to be most useful. (How was it medieval?)

Revision

Use of positive verbs is stronger, less cumbersome.

Carl Becker's perspective keeps him from

This reference makes explicit who was taken in. Good use of a dependent construction.

being seduced, as the textbook writer clearly

is, by the "modern" ring of the catch-words

This added phrase clarifies how they used their "catch-words."

employed by the philosophes in their criticis

Use of a simple verb here is more forceful.

of medieval attitudes. Voltaire wrote positiv

Provides better sentence rhythm to add these words.

about toleration, but was himself incredibly

Specific examples make the argument more concrete.

intolerant of Catholics and Jews. And his was

the medieval kind of intolerance, bred from t

belief that only he possessed an understandin

of truth.

Notice the more complex nature of the finished sentences as the writer works to define terms and explain relationships for the

need not even be written until you have finished revising. It should grow out of your completed paper and, at the same time, go beyond it.

Reminding your audience of what they have read is only one function served by a good conclusion. This section should not simply be a rewording of your thesis paragraph, but should demonstrate how that thesis was developed into the whole paper your audience has just read. Your conclusion should also anticipate one large, final "So what?" from the audience. Reread your paper with this question in mind and reflect on the significance of what you have written. For a paper on Becker's view, a possible explanation of significance might read:

```
The point is not just that Becker's thesis is
right, in my opinion, but that the textbook
interpretation is wrong. Textbooks are invaluable
in introducing students to historical periods,
but may not be reliable sources of
interpretation. For one thing, they are
necessarily general and cannot offer enough
examples or evidence to prove the statements they
make. This quality of textbooks influences the
student to accept broad generalizations on faith.
Historians must push interpretations beyond the
point of faith.
```

Many parts of your paper lead logically to such a conclusion, but because your orientation is toward Becker's view, this comment fits nowhere else in the body of your paper. Your conclusion should be implicit in the body of your paper, but implicit ideas should be verbalized and made explicit at the end. Your readers then feel satisfied that they have indeed followed your line of argument because they share with you a sense of closure in your conclusion.

Lastly, you might use your conclusion to suggest to the reader the questions that your paper raises. Making yourself aware of the implications helps you to put your effort into a larger perspective; making your reader aware of them enhances the usefulness of your paper. What are the implications of the paper on Becker's view for the study of history or philosophy or literature? A final passage might read:

```
It is not a judicious practice to read a book
without probing beyond the author's words. Were
Renaissance humanists really the individuals they
tell us they were? Did the Victorians really
believe that women were asexual? Becker's methods
could profitably be used to understand more
critically every age in history.
```

When you write the other types of contemplative papers, you will use many of the strategies we have just explained for the defend-a-thesis paper. As you read about papers that compare and contrast competing theses, solve a puzzle, and speculate, be sure to refer to general strategies explained above. The following sections of this chapter will explain procedures distinctly helpful to the particular types of papers under consideration.

Compare and contrast

Here are some examples of assignments that ask you to compare, contrast, or choose between two competing views.

- Compare and contrast Descartes' and Hume's view of personal identity.
- Stalin and Hitler represented two opposing ideological systems, yet some historians see their methods of rule as strikingly similar. Compare and contrast their actual methods of governing. Do you agree or disagree with these historians?
- Compare the image of the future in Zamyatin's *We* with the image of the future in Orwell's *1984*.

In writing this type of paper it is your responsibility to: state the two items to be compared accurately and fairly; identify the specific areas to be compared and contrasted; identify the similarities; identify the differences; and develop a thesis and present your point of view on the similarities and differences.

Getting started

In the first paper discussed, the attack or defense of an author's view, you had to understand one major idea, so a simple summary of that idea was enough to begin your analysis. In a compare-and-contrast paper, you are always dealing with at least two topics. Therefore, getting started is a bit more complicated.

Since you are working with combinations of specific ideas, people, or events, you need to begin by understanding the topics separately. If you are dealing with the thought of two writers, summarize their ideas. If you are analyzing two events, groups, or individuals, treat each separately. Act, at this point, as if you were writing two papers explaining the two topics. You will not know what specific points you will be comparing or contrasting in your paper, so do not get caught up in details at this early stage. You should develop a general understanding of the separate topics which will serve as a basis for your comparative analysis.

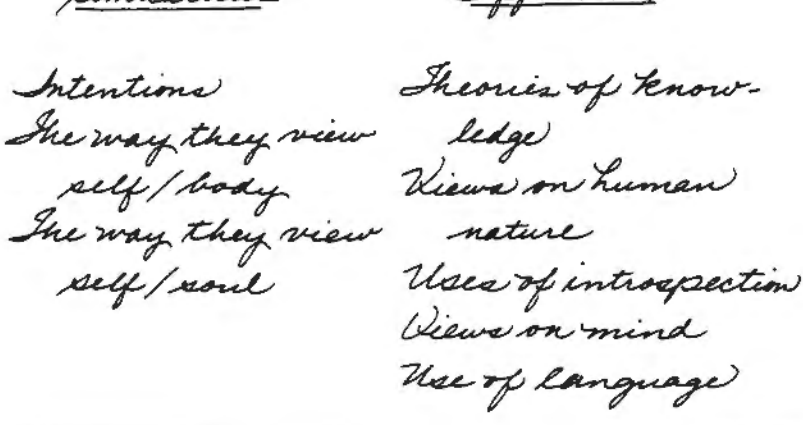
Your separate explanation of each topic is merely a way to get started. In later drafts you will work to synthesize ideas. Too often students submit what amounts to two separate essays that not only fail to relate to each other, but do not deal with the same specific areas. At early stages you are writing to find the connections which you will explain clearly later on.

Once you have a good understanding of the topics and have a set of notes on both of them, you need to identify the areas to be analyzed. Although you may not incorporate into your paper all of the areas you identify as being related, a careful search for such areas will help give structure to your thinking. For example, before you plunge into evaluations and judgments on the views of Descartes and Hume, you should identify the specific areas which you will evaluate: their theories of knowledge, their intentions, their views of human nature, their views of freedom. For each category in this list, you should jot down your notes of supporting material so that you will have a running record of the reasons you selected the category.

Your notes should also give you some indications of which categories are important. In the case of Descartes and Hume, the most important category, of course, is each writer's view of personal identity, but you may decide that to get to an understanding of this central area you will need to compare and contrast the two thinkers' views on the nature of knowledge, human nature, and language. Once you have made your choices, you need to decide in which areas similarities exist and in which areas there are differences. Generate two lists, one of similarities, the other of differences. As you identify possible areas of agreement and disagreement, record them under the appropriate classifications. A beginning list might look like figure 8.4.

By making lists and then drawing conclusions, you will greatly increase the chances that your paper will focus on the important areas that need to be compared to answer the question. Lists also allow you to rank-order the categories you select according to their importance to the question. But remember, while lists can help create the eventual structure for your paper, simple lists cannot convey the reasons you made the choices you

FIGURE 8.4



did. Lists are working outlines for specific purposes. At every step of the process by which you select the categories you are going to compare, write out your reasons for the choices and the evidence that supports your choices. You will need all of this material when you put your lists into connected prose.

At this point you are still left with a major decision to make before you begin writing. Although the assignment will usually require you to compare and contrast two topics, you should decide if the similarities or the differences between the two are greater. Almost invariably, a compare-and-contrast question requires you to state a point of view and argue it. Your essay will probably be evaluated not only for your success in discovering relationships, but for your success in analyzing and evaluating those relationships. At a minimum, the instructor will want to know which set of relationships is stronger. Therefore, your essay may well emphasize the similarities or the differences at the expense of the other. This emphasis should be communicated to the reader early in the paper. A concise, unambiguous thesis statement will help you to organize your essay as well as allow your reader to read your paper in a context. Examples of such thesis statements are:

```
Despite similarities in their concepts of self,
Descartes and Hume disagree in almost every other
important area, including personal identity.
```

or

```
It would appear at first glance that Descartes
and Hume disagree on the nature of personal
identity, but a close examination of their
thought reveals striking similarities that
overshadow their methodological differences.
```

At this stage, you should have in writing all of the materials you need to prepare a first draft.

Writing the first draft

Reread pages 182–186 of this chapter before proceeding, for a review of general draft-writing procedures. The comments given below are designed to apply specifically to a compare-and-contrast paper.

The major choice you will face in writing this type of paper is how to integrate the four different parts of your answer into one cohesive paper. Two model plans are offered here as possible approaches.

Model A Linear Model

I Your thesis paragraph

II Statement of topic 1

III Statement of topic 2

IV Comparisons and contrasts between topics 1 and 2

V Evaluation and conclusion

or

Model B Integrated Model

I Your thesis paragraph

II Similarities between topics 1 and 2

III Differences between topics 1 and 2

IV Evaluation and conclusion

If you adopt model A, you may find it most useful to begin writing part IV first, for what you choose to compare and contrast will determine how much of topics 1 and 2 you describe. A common problem in the execution of a compare-and-contrast paper is the tendency to write three separate essays that do not touch at all points. You might describe much more in steps II and III than the reader needs to know to understand the comparisons you make in part IV, or you may compare aspects of II and III that you did not describe. Another pitfall to avoid in model A is repeating yourself too much. Descriptions given in parts II and III need not be repeated when they are picked up again in part IV. Executed well, model A offers a logical, clear progression from description to analysis to evaluation.

Model B represents a more complex approach, for the organization of the paper is not based on your initial description of the topics, but on the relationships themselves. The focus is on the categories of similarities and differences: theories of knowledge, intentions, language. Each time a comparison is made you need to give the reader the information (description) required for the relationship to be seen clearly. This approach insures that the areas of comparison are explicit and at the center of the essay. The major problem of model B is the tendency to give too little description and evidence.

Since you are dealing with complex organization in both types of papers you may find it useful to generate two outlines with more detail than the examples above. Keep in mind that these outlines are tentative guides to creating a workable structure. You may need to flesh them out, rearrange them, or even try writing from them, until you are satisfied that you have a plan. Expanded outlines from models A and B could look like this:

Model A Linear Model

I Thesis statement

II What Descartes thinks

A Theory of knowledge

B Theory of the self
1 in relation to body
2 in relation to soul
C Human nature
D Identity

III What Hume thinks
A Theory of knowledge
B Theory of the self
1 in relation to body
2 in relation to soul
C Human nature
D Identity

IV Comparisons
A Theories of knowledge: they are different
B On the self
1 in relation to the body; they are similar
2 in relation to the soul; they are similar
C Human nature; they are different
D Identity; they are different

V Evaluation and conclusion

Note the absolute symmetry in steps II, III, and IV.

Model B Integrated Model

I Thesis statement

II Similarities between Hume and Descartes
A On the self-soul
1 Descartes
2 Hume
B On the soul-body
1 Descartes
2 Hume

III Differences between Descartes and Hume
A Theory of knowledge
1 Descartes
2 Hume
B Human nature
1 Descartes
2 Hume
C Identity
1 Descartes
2 Hume

IV. Evaluation and conclusion

Note that at every stage both Descartes and Hume must be discussed in conjunction with each category.

We strongly discourage you from trying to write a comparison-and-contrast paper by giving all descriptions and evaluations of topic 1 and then repeating the process for topic 2. Although this method seems easiest at first, these dual essays rarely parallel each other.

Revising Once you are satisfied with your organization and have produced paragraphs that fit together into a coherent unit, you need to give your attention to the clear, economic expression of your ideas for an audience. In addition to previous suggestions on revising, you will need, in a compare-and-contrast paper, to pay special attention to two reader-oriented tasks.

The introduction of thesis paragraph. It is useful to think of this paper (and almost every paper) as moving at two levels. At one level you are developing your thesis, and at another level you are building in signposts so that readers can follow your procedure. You must not only state your thesis, you must make the reader aware of how you intend to demonstrate your thesis. It is usually appropriate to provide a clear signpost in your opening paragraph. For example:

```
Despite similarities in their concepts of
self, Descartes's and Hume's views of personal
identity are fundamentally different. I intend to
show that Hume and Descartes differ because their
theories of knowledge and their views of human
nature are diametrically opposed to one another.
```

In this short introduction you have stated your point of view, how you are going to proceed, and what your primary areas of discussion are going to be. You have prepared your reader to read your paper.

Transitions. Transitions are especially important in a paper that asks the reader to follow and understand a series of relationships. Your organization in draft form may be workable, but you still have to make sure that you connect the several parts effectively. This connection is most easily accomplished by being direct and honest with the reader. Point out relationships even when they appear obvious to you. Assume that your audience is not familiar with the two topics to be compared. This assumption will encourage you to be explicit. For example, in model A, when moving from part III to part IV, you might write:

```
The preceding discussions of the ideas of
Descartes and Hume expose minimal similarities,
but many differences. Moreover, the similarities
exist in relatively unimportant areas, while
their differences are significant. These
```

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differences, especially their opposing views on
identity, arise from a fundamental disagreement
over the way we receive knowledge.
```

This paragraph, then, leads directly into a discussion of their theories of knowledge.

In model B, in moving from IIIA to IIIB, the transition might read like this:

```
While Descartes is a rationalist and saw
introspection as a source of understanding,
Hume's rigorous empiricism caused him to search
elsewhere for an understanding of human nature.
```

This transition can lead to a discussion of their respective points of view.

Note, in both of these examples, the constant attention given to summing up and restating earlier conclusions as a way to maintain the connection between that which has been discussed and that which will be discussed.

The puzzle or problem paper

Here are some examples of papers that ask you to resolve a puzzle or explore a defined problem.

- Could all life be a dream?
- Does a blind person understand what "red" means?
- If human beings have free will, does this mean that their behavior is unpredictable?

In writing this type of paper it is your responsibility to explain what the problem is; explain why it is a problem; formulate, state, and defend criteria for an acceptable solution to the problem; and present and defend your solution.

Getting started This type of paper is encountered most frequently in philosophy courses. It is one of the most mysterious paper types, for it requires critical, analytical thinking and sensitivity to words and ideas. In approaching this paper you are left alone with your reasoning powers and the knowledge you have gained from class and from earlier studies. With papers discussed earlier in this chapter, your beginning point was a book or the thoughts of others. Starting this paper can be more difficult because you must first generate the raw materials with which you work.

The starting point is your realization that the question asked is supposed to be a puzzle, without an easy or obvious answer. The data you are given are all in the question itself, so to discover the exact intent of

the question, begin by analyzing the different senses in which the most important words are used. Your solution to the puzzle may well depend on how you define the key words. For example, in the question "Does a blind person understand what 'red' means?" you have to decide how you are going to define the word "understand." One might argue that blind people cannot understand what "red" means because they lack the experience of red, the visual sensation we associate with red and, hence, are unable to identify an instance of red. On the other hand, there are facts about "red" which blind people know: frogs are not red; a red flag means danger; sunsets are red; and so on. Thus, blind people can use the word "red" in many contexts, just as seeing people do. It is true that they lack the visual sensation, but is that necessary to understand "red"? Your answer to this sample question depends on how you use the word "understand."

If a puzzle paper has no obvious solution, neither does it have a "wrong" answer in the traditional sense. In fact, your answer may not be as important as your explanation of what you think the question means. Philosophers put a heavy emphasis on method, on the identification of the problem, and on the explanation of why it is a problem. Therefore, you should spend a large part of your "getting started" time on formulating your understanding of the question. You will find free writing in your journal (chapter 2) to be a constructive way of thinking about what lies behind the question, what the key words mean, and what the implications of those words are.

Do not shy away from seemingly strange or exotic answers. These are often the most fun and the most productive in terms of learning to think critically. While studying possible interpretations, write down every thought, every reaction. Remember, your notes are the only materials you have to refer to when it is time to write. You will need an accurate record of why you eliminated options, why you chose to make certain choices, how you defined key words. It is surprisingly difficult to reconstruct your thought processes without a written record. Figure 8.5 shows sample notes on the question of blind people and red. Write down all questions and ideas for both sides, whether or not they seem important.

One of the purposes of a puzzle paper is to get you out of your mindset, to explore a problem in creative ways. You may end up by answering yes or no, but you may also decide that sighted people do not really understand what red means. Play with all possible ideas on paper until you feel that you have explored all options.

By that time you may well have a sense of your solution to the puzzle. If not, then begin organizing your free-writing notes into categories according to the possible solutions (figure 8.6).

For each solution note the objections that can be made against it. If you find all but one has objections against it, that is your solution, and you defend it by showing that objections exist for all other possible solutions. If you find that all have objections to them, as is often the case,

Understand — we understand what electrons mean without seeing them. There is a sense in which I understand a word without experiencing it. A slave knows what freedom is; we know what a vacuum is. Also explore other analogous questions such as do deaf people hum? What other ways to approach the word understand? Color-blind people who cannot distinguish red have a sense of color, but not of red itself. So they know that red is a color, but have not experienced it directly, etc.

FIGURE 8.5

and you can think of no other possible solution, then it is your option to advance the most acceptable solution or to argue that no solution is acceptable.

Writing the first draft

First review the procedures for writing a first draft on pages 182–186 of this chapter. For a puzzle paper, you will need to pay special attention to creating a format or a structure that will allow you the widest latitude for discussing your thinking processes, to raise questions, and to describe your methods as well as your conclusions. The most direct organization for a puzzle paper with a clear solution is:

I Present the problem

II List the possible solutions

III State the objections to the solutions

IV Present your solution

V Defend your solution

If a definition of the problem is the focus of the paper, the following is a possible organization:

I Present and analyze the question
- **A** various meanings of the question
- **B** implications of the different meanings
- **C** key words

II State the criteria for an acceptable answer

FIGURE 8.6

1. Yes, blind people can understand what "red" means.

2. No, they cannot understand.

3. It does not matter if blind people can or cannot understand what "red" means.

4. Nobody can understand what "red" means.

III Are there any acceptable solutions?
- **A** If not, explain why not
- **B** If so, proceed to IV

IV Present your solution

V Defend your solution

Revising Some general procedures for revising a contemplative paper are given on pages 186–191 of this chapter, but you should be aware of some special conventions of philosophical writing as you revise a puzzle paper.

A paper of this type should contain an explicit, running commentary on procedure as well as content. From introductory paragraph to conclusion, tell the reader what you are saying and why you believe it is important for your argument to say what you are saying. In other words, explain the "warrant." (See chapter 2.) Instead of building up to one major conclusion, the puzzle paper is strewn with conclusions as you eliminate alternatives and make assertions about individual words and ideas. Conclusions are based on earlier premises and, themselves, become new premises. You might find it useful to make liberal use of those words that indicate logical transitions (*therefore, such as, so, because, since, accordingly, for, so it follows that*), and those that signify countervailing reasons (*but, however, in spite of the fact, despite*).

Finally, during the revising stage of this paper, as in all papers, you need to choose your words carefully for exact meaning. Since in a puzzle paper you are trying to convey meanings of words that are separated from other meanings by nuances, the words you select to express these subtle differences can determine the success of your effort. In general, it is best

to avoid metaphor in philosophy papers, such as "ship of state." If you cannot avoid ambiguous words (*real, determine, meaning, concept, idea*) or words for which there are several meanings (*freedom, voluntary, understanding, objective, subjective*), you should define them carefully within your paper.

The speculative paper

Here are some examples of assignments that ask you to speculate on the probable or the most acceptable outcome from a given set of circumstances:

- If Stalin were to return, would he be able to rule the U.S.S.R. as he did in his own lifetime?
- Hobbes said that we are obliged to obey the state only so long as it guarantees our security. How would he react to compulsory military service in time of war?
- How would George Orwell react to B. F. Skinner's *Walden II*?

In writing this type of paper it is your responsibility to understand completely the information given within the question, that is, the topics you have to work with; develop a prediction; state the prediction; and defend your prediction.

Getting started The speculative paper introduces a "what if" dimension. It is of the first importance to grasp the purpose of a paper of this type before you begin. You are being asked to display your knowledge and understanding of two topics by describing an imaginary confrontation between them. This confrontation requires you to make judgments and choices based on your understanding. By asking you to apply your knowledge to an entirely novel situation, the instructor is testing your ability to use the material you have learned.

Consequently, your instructor will grade this paper on the power of your argument. Have you convinced the reader that your prediction could come true? It is more important to be logical than it is to be imaginative. Your prediction should be a logical extension of documented belief or behavior. In assignments of this sort the etymology of the word "contemplation" is most applicable. You must feel so comfortable in the temple of learning that you can perform augury there.

Take, for example, the question about Stalin and the U.S.S.R. This question requires you to show how, based on historical experience, Stalin would probably try to rule the Soviet Union today, and the ways that the Soviet Union—the party, the government, the military, the people—would probably respond. The tension between the two parts of the question arises from the changes that have taken place in the Soviet Union in the

quarter century since Stalin's death. Are these changes real and extensive enough to prevent a return to Stalinistic rule? Or are they only superficial and easily reversed?

To answer this question you need to know how Stalin ruled, what the Soviet Union is like today, and where the areas of compatibility and incompatibility exist. Your prewriting, therefore, should begin by summarizing for yourself Stalin's policies and the main characteristics of his rule, and the salient features of Soviet society during his rule. Since you cannot possibly note everything, limit your notes to areas that seem relevant—general categories (the economy, war, political methods) and obviously important policies (collectivization, industrialization, and regimentation). A second set of notes on the Soviet Union today is necessary for the comparison.

Reducing your notes to lists may help you see relationships and omissions. Such lists, like lists 1 and 2 in figure 8.7, will also help you select the areas you will work with, thus limiting your area of responsibility to manageable proportions. Having decided on the important areas to discuss and possessing a general sense of similarities, you will need to add a third list, the characteristics of Stalin's rule (list 3 in figure 8.7).

History has shown that the items on lists 1 and 3 are compatible. The question is, can the items on list 2 be substituted for list 1 with the same results? Your answer depends on several choices you make. For example, the majority of items on lists 1 and 2 are dissimilar. These discrepancies may lead you toward a negative answer to the question. However, you may wish to weigh the items. Despite the differences between the two lists, one variable is the same: all political power continues to reside in the party. You could argue that if one man gains control of the party again, he could reverse the changes in all of the other areas. The test is to relate the items on list 3 to the characteristics on list 2. (Is rule by terror, force, and purges probable in a strong, stable society that is at peace?) However you weigh the data, these facts will be the basis for your prediction and will constitute a major portion of your paper.

One reminder: the lists you work with are not entities in themselves. They are useful tools to help you visualize data and relationships. The more important parts of your notes, as you plan your first draft, are the pieces of information you have written about the topics and your thinking about the topics and their relationships as you progressed towards your thesis.

Writing the first draft

Review the steps in writing the first draft presented in the first part of this chapter. The organization of the speculative paper will depend on your topic and thesis, but you will need to construct a plan that integrates evidence and analysis. A paper that argues that Stalin could not rule today could, for example, begin with a description of Stalin's policies and methods, then move to the Soviet Union he ruled and the Soviet Union today. A paper that argues that Stalin could rule today might well begin

List 1: Soviet Union, 1929-53
rural economy
isolated, weak
one man rules
regimented society
war
party has all power
List 2: Soviet Union Today
urban, industrial economy
a world power
collective leadership — one man dominates
still regimented, but areas where control relaxed
peace
party has all power
List 3: Characteristics of Stalin's Rule
terror/fear/purges
collectivization of agriculture
forced industrialization
total command economy — heavy industry over consumer goods
socialist realism — regimentation of the arts

FIGURE 8.7

with a comparison of the Soviet Union, past and present. There are several other possible organizations for this type of paper. You, of course, should use any structure that helps you translate your plan into connected prose. As usual, be ready to change anything at this point in your paper development.

Revising Again, review strategies for revising presented earlier in this chapter and also in chapter 6 and 7. Collectively, these sections have discussed writing

for an audience, but editing and proofreading have not yet received sufficient attention. Revising, as you know from earlier discussions, is more than editing and proofreading, but review of the paper for punctuation, spelling and grammar is an important last step to any paper. A good idea can be diminished in the eyes of a reader if it contains distracting errors.

Convention dictates the proper ways to construct and punctuate sentences and spell words. When you revise, always keep a dictionary and an English handbook nearby for quick reference. If you are not sure how to spell words or where to place commas, look them up!

By the time you are proofreading your paper you will have read it perhaps too many times; whole parts of it will be fixed in your memory. This intimate knowledge of your essay makes proofreading for spelling, grammar, and punctuation a difficult chore. Often you will inadvertently skip over a part you know well or read for meaning again instead of for accuracy. Try reading your paper differently, from another angle, perhaps from end to beginning. Such a technique will allow you to break out of your earlier reading patterns.

Correctness and neatness, in themselves, do not make good contemplative papers, but as your instructors contemplate your grade, you do not want them to be distracted by an outside form that is not correct and neat.

QUESTIONS

1 What are the four major categories of papers of contemplation? How do they differ from each other?

2 How are papers of contemplation different from papers of analysis and review? In what ways are they similar?

3 What does the term "open ended" mean when it pertains to questions asked in papers of contemplation?

4 Why do instructors assign papers of contemplation?

EXERCISES

1 A professor assigns the following question: "What are the major ethical implications if scientists perfect cloning?" How can you tell if this question is intended to be answered in a paper of contemplation or in a research paper? How would the papers differ?

2 A professor assigns the following question; "Which painter do you think best represented the Expressionist school before World War I, Matisse or Picasso?" What does the question require you to do? What are the areas of your responsibility? What factors do you need to consider before you can answer the question?

3 Briefly identify the major differences among the four categories of contemplative papers. In which category would each of the following questions go? Explain your choices.

a Is television the most significant influence on our life-styles?

b What are the relative strengths of television and radio?

c It has been said that television is a "vast wasteland." Attack or defend this statement.

d If television did not exist, what would happen to American society?

e What would Benjamin Franklin think of television?

f Is television or the automobile the most significant technological influence in our society?

g What are the major problems with the way television is managed in America today?

4 Without actually concerning yourself with the answer to the following question, work out a list of subordinate questions and a strategy for developing an answer: "Can we know what is evil and what is good?"