

Essay 1 Prompts

PHIL 101

Instructions: Choose exactly **one** of the following three questions, and answer it in **600–700 words**. Try to make your answer as **straightforward** and **concise** as possible; the aim is to sound clear, not smart. A good rule of thumb is to write in such a way that your friend who has no experience with philosophy can understand (and feel the force of) the problem or argument you are describing. Be sure that you have read the associated readings closely and thoroughly understand the author's main point.

1. Carefully explain in your own words what the problem of other minds is that Nagel introduces at the beginning of Section 2.3. (See especially the bottom of p. 19 and the first paragraph of p. 20.) How does the problem of other minds relate to the more general problem of objectivity that Nagel discusses in the reading? How do **behaviorists** and **solipsists** respond to the problem? How does Nagel respond to the problem?
2. Summarize the three different considerations that Descartes raises in order to argue that most (if not all) of our beliefs fall short of certainty. Pick **one** of these ways and state whether this consideration should cause us to doubt our beliefs about the world. You should provide reasons to support your thinking.
3. In the Second Meditation, Descartes gives an argument known as the *Cogito* (the famous “I think therefore I am”). What is the self or “I” that exists according to this argument? Explain how the argument justifies believing that this exists. Are you persuaded that he is correct? Why or why not?