

# Essay 1 Prompts

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Phil UA-5 Minds and Machines

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The paper should be 2-4 **pages**. It is not a long paper assignment, but I expect you to take care in writing it. Please defend your claims with reasons and citations. The papers are due by **11 am on March 12**. Please bring **two** hard copies to class (one for your peer reviewer and one for me), and submit *exactly* the same copy to the Assignments page of our NYU Classes site. TurnItIn will run automatically. Please do not include *any* identifying information on either copy other than your NYU University ID number (not your netID). Papers with other identifying information will lose 5 percentage points.

1. Cordelia Fine in *Delusions of Gender* writes, “Neuroscience can be dangerous when mishandled, so if you’re not sure, be safe” (167). She discusses several inferences made in discussions of the implications that neuroscience has for gender differences and explains why she thinks they are not “safe”. Three of them are:
  - (i) Inferring psychological function from brain structure,
  - (ii) Inferring that a claim is explanatory because it contains neuroscientific terms,
  - (iii) Inferring innate or immutable qualities from brain differences.

Pick one of these inference patterns. Explain why Fine thinks that it can lead to false or unwarranted conclusions. Do you agree with her concern with using these inference patterns? Why or why not?

2. Why does Descartes think that the mind and the body are distinct substances? Explain his argument. How depend on the Conceivability-Possibility Principle? Is his argument convincing? Why or why not?
3. Explain Princess Elisabeth’s argument against Descartes’ claim that the mind and the body are distinct substances. Explain her argument. Is it argument convincing? Why or why not?

4. How does Elisabeth's argument relate to Descartes' argument? Be sure to explain modus tollens, modus ponens, and validity. Which argument (Descartes' or Elisabeth's) do you find more convincing? Why?
5. Explain J. J. C. Smart's view. Which category of theories does it fall under of those we have discussed? Discuss one worry for this sort of theory that we discussed in class, and consider how Smart might respond. Do you find Smart's view plausible? Why or why not?
6. What is functionalism? How does it relate to behaviorism? Do you think that functionalism escapes all of the objections to behaviorism? Why or why not?
7. What is functionalism? Give two objections to functionalism and consider how the functionalist might respond to your objections. Do you find functionalism plausible? Explain why or why not.
8. What would the type-identity theorist think about Samantha in *Her*? Would she have mental states? Consciousness? What would the functionalist think? Which view do you think is a more plausible account? Why?
9. Explain what "uploading one's mind" means. Explain why Susan Schneider thinks we cannot uploading *our* minds. Do you think she is correct? Why or why not?
10. Explain what physicalism is. Explain one worry that David Chalmers gives that physicalism is false. Consider a response on behalf of the physicalist. Is his argument convincing? Why or why not?
11. Why does David Chalmers think that there can be no scientific explanation of consciousness? Consider an objection to his argument and how Chalmers might respond. Do you find his argument convincing? Why or why not?