

PHLB81 – Theories of Mind Second Essay Topics

Select one of the following topics to write your second essay on. Please remember to keep your essay between 1800-2000 words (no more, no less). As before, a philosophy essay is concerned with presenting and analysing arguments using reason. You do not have to pick a side. If you choose to defend one side of the argument, it does not matter which side of the argument you pick. What matters is the quality of your analysis of the arguments and the quality of the new arguments you advance. I do not advise looking at secondary sources for such a short paper but if you are stuck secondary material can help generate ideas. Always remember to cite your sources (even if they all come from the Kim book).

1. *Use a Topic from the First Essay List.* Choose a topic from the list for Essay 1 but, of course, NOT one you have already written on!
2. *Minds and Machines.* Can the mind be understood as a kind of computing machine? Carefully outline and explain Turing Machine Functionalism (e.g. why is called ‘functionalism’), describe the structure of this theory and assess its strengths and weaknesses, especially with respect to the so-called ‘Chinese Room’ argument against Machine Functionalism.
3. *Mental Causation & Non-Reductive Physicalism.* A very old aspect of the mind-body problem involves mental causation (the apparently common-sense idea that events in the physical world cause mental effects and vice versa). Even within a physicalist framework, it is surprisingly difficult to show in a plausible way how mental causation is supposed to work. At least, that seems true for non-reductive physicalism. Outline the arguments that show why non-reductive physicalism has difficulty integrating mental causation into its theoretical structure. Does the problem of mental causation show that non-reductive physicalism must be wrong?
4. *Externalism About the Mind.* There are some famous arguments that try to show that the content of our mental states is in some way external to our brains or bodies. Clearly explain these arguments. Do you think they are successful? What would be the impact on the theories of mind we have examined if externalism is accepted?
5. *Consciousness and Physicalism.* Many think that consciousness poses a special problem for physicalist theories of the mind. Discuss the nature of consciousness. Consider how consciousness might be problematic for physicalist theories we have examined. Do you think consciousness shows that physicalism is wrong? Why or why not?