

Essay

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Your essay should be about 2500 words (between 9-11 pages if double-spaced, though I prefer single spaced) and will require substantial critical evaluation and engagement with the relevant literature. It should be guided by the following prompt:

To best address a specific issue in neuroethics (e.g., addiction, depression, psychopathy, brain reading), what would be the most ethical change to either public policy or human behavior? (Examples: the use of psychedelics, widespread acceptance of the brain disease model, elimination of stigma, a passion for cognitive behavioral therapy, deletion of social media apps, acceptance of free will skepticism, a legal right to cognitive liberty). Explain why and justify your position in relation to some of the ideas and readings in this class. Articulate what you take to be the single strongest objection to your position (e.g., an alternative view represented in our readings), then reply to it.

Thinking about
Philosophy

Writing a
philosophy paper



This prompt is meant to help you find a way into writing the essay that starts from what interests you most but ultimately connects it to our assigned readings (call it a **top-down approach**). The more typical approach in a philosophy class is to start with a critique of one of the assigned readings and then situate that within a debate in the field (indeed, that's the orientation of my [Writing in Philosophy \(https://uab.instructure.com/courses/1596654/files/71556983?wrap=1\)](https://uab.instructure.com/courses/1596654/files/71556983?wrap=1) ↓ [document](https://uab.instructure.com/courses/1596654/files/71556983/download?download_frd=1)). This more **bottom-up approach** works too, though if you go that route you should still fit it into the above prompt, which forces you to make clear what the broader issue is and where you stand.

But the primary goal is to develop an argument on a narrow topic squarely within neuroethics that's grounded in the theories and arguments we've covered in this class. The essay prompt zooms out to big picture societal issues, but your argument isn't meant to *fully* address one of those. That would take a dissertation or book! Rather, the point is to briefly connect your narrow discussion to a big picture issue, just to show what the implications are, why the narrow debate

matters. For example:

- An essay on brain interventions (Module 3) might argue that psychedelics are a promising form of brain intervention with a low risk-benefit ratio. That's the meat of the essay. In the intro/conclusion section the essay could briefly note that this would require legalizing psychedelics for medicinal use, which matters because they can help address the broader societal problem of neurological disorders like PTSD and OCD.
- An essay on free will (Module 2) might argue that neuroscience does undermine freedom to some degree. The heart of the essay would tackle that narrow issue in neuroethics. But the intro/conclusion would connect that to the essay prompt by explaining why the issue matters —e.g. to properly recognize the culpability of criminals, to reform overly punitive laws, to increase compassion and reduce the amount of blame we hurl toward one another.

Sometimes the narrow neuroethical debate and the broad social issue are already quite closely linked. For example:

- An essay on addiction (Module 5) might argue that the “brain disease” label is legitimate to embrace, even if addiction isn't strictly a disease. The intro/conclusion section of the essay should connect this to the broader social issues, but with this topic those issues would already be discussed in the body of the essay.
- An essay on brain reading (Module 9) might argue that brain imaging and similar evidence is at present too dangerous to be used in the courts. The intro/conclusion might connects this with concerns about how the criminal justice system is already flawed, but those issues may well arise in the body of the paper.

Further instructions are in the [Essay Assignment document \(PDF\)](#).

<https://uab.instructure.com/courses/1596654/files/71905241?wrap=1> ↓

https://uab.instructure.com/courses/1596654/files/71905241/download?download_frd=1 (to be posted around Week 10). It contains directions, essay topics, the grading rubric, and tips on writing philosophy essays.

Points 100

Submitting a file upload

File Types doc, docx, txt, rtf, and pdf

Due	For	Available from	Until
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Apr 26

Everyone

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Essay Rubric

You've already rated students with this rubric. Any major changes could affect their assessment results.

Criteria	Ratings		Pts
Task Completion (a) Complete the entire task set forth by the instructor in the paper assignment. The body of the paper should support the paper's thesis with appropriate evidence grounded in your own thoughts but also the class readings, lectures, and (if appropriate) outside sources. Engage with relevant authors and have a bibliography. (b) Stay on topic. Avoid going on tangents or adding details that aren't crucial for understanding the issue at hand and your thesis. (c) Make sure to do some critical evaluation that ultimately pushes the discussion forward, beyond what's in the relevant literature that you discuss and that we covered in this course.	20 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	20 pts
Accuracy & Acumen (a) The paper should demonstrate an accurate and precise understanding of the ideas, evidence, and arguments that you discuss. Accuracy is still important regarding fine details. (b) Demonstrate philosophical acuity in critically evaluating arguments and in anticipating and responding to objections.	25 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	25 pts
Depth & Clarity (a) Move beyond simple description and summary to reflect a clear, in-depth understanding of the topic and material. When discussing arguments or objections, focus on quality or depth over quantity. (b) Be clear and detailed when explaining key ideas. Use examples to illustrate points. Imagine your reader is someone who hasn't taken this class. Think: "If my friend read this, would they be able to understand exactly what's going on?" This will help you demonstrate your understanding of the material.	25 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	25 pts
Introduction & Thesis Statement (a) Avoid lengthy or dramatic introductions. The introductory paragraph(s) should briefly orient the reader to the topic in plain language and briefly describe the plan for the rest of the paper. (b) The paper should have a clear thesis statement (usually best stated toward the end of the introduction) that addresses the paper	10 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	10 pts

topic and expresses an interesting claim you intend to defend. Make sure your thesis statement is clear, specific, and on-topic. You can absolutely use the first person in an argumentative essay, especially for your thesis statement (e.g. "I will argue...").			
Structure & Organization (a) The body paragraphs should be organized in a logical manner, appropriate in length, and ideally framed by topic sentences. (b) The paper may have a short conclusion/summary, but it's not required. (c) Use quotations as needed to ground your discussion of someone's view, but don't rely too heavily on them. When you use quotes, introduce them; don't just insert them without any explanation of who said it and what the relevance is.	10 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	10 pts
Style & Mechanics (a) The paper should demonstrate a command of the writing process and the author's care in crafting it. (b) Use good citation practices. Provide full bibliographic details (no particular citation style is required; just use some standard style, like APA). (c) Avoid many errors of spelling, punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, etc. But don't worry about being fancy with your writing style in philosophy. The clarity and organization of your thoughts is most important.	10 pts Full Marks	0 pts No Marks	10 pts
Total Points: 100			