

## FIRST WRITING ASSIGNMENT

**Instructions:** Write a two- to three-page (typed, double-spaced) essay on ONE of the following topics. Each of these topics needs to be narrowed and made more precise for you to address it in a satisfactory way. Part of your assignment is to appropriately define your thesis.

The assignment is due Thursday, October 19 by 2:00 p.m. If you want to turn your paper in during class, that's fine, of course. If you would rather e-mail it to me ([hubin.1@osu.edu](mailto:hubin.1@osu.edu)) as an attachment in Word or WordPerfect, that's okay too. Just make sure to get it to me by the deadline.

1. Answer Dennett's question for him: where is Dennett? Also, does Dennett survive throughout this story? Try to make the most compelling case for the answers that you offer. Be sure to consider and respond to the best opposing arguments you can think of.
2. One of the most commonly accepted views on the mind/body problem is "substance dualism". Carefully describe this view and critically evaluate it considering the most convincing arguments for it and the most compelling criticisms of it.
3. There are a variety of materialist conceptions of the mind and mental events. These range from eliminative materialism, which denies the existence of minds, mental states and events, to reductive materialism, which identifies these things with brains and brain events and states. It also includes logical behaviorism, which identifies mental events with behavior and dispositions to behave. Pick the materialist conception of the mind that you find most plausible and justify the claim that it is superior to the alternative materialist conceptions. What problems remain unsolved by what you take to be the strongest materialist conception of mind?
4. Functionalism, which identifies mental events in terms of their characteristic causes and effects, is neutral on the metaphysical question of what kinds of things carry out mental functions. This means that functionalism is compatible with dualism or materialism. The materialist functionalist will assert that there is a "token identity" between human mental states and brain states, and (more generally) a "token identity" between each mental states of any sort (human, animal, klingon or machine—if these latter ones exist) and some physical state or other. How does this sort of "token identity" differ from the sort of identity defended by the central state materialist? Is functionalism a better theory of mental events than central state materialism?
5. A favorite scenario for science fiction is the thinking machine. From Asimov's robot stories to Star Trek's Data, people have imagined machines that have mental lives: thoughts, beliefs and (sometimes) hopes, desires and fears. Obviously, we are nowhere

near having the capability to make a machine that we seriously want to describe as having a mental life. But, is such a thing conceivable or is there some inherent reason why machines cannot think? If machines could think, could they have the same thoughts *we* have? What would the different theories of mental events say about these questions?