

Reading response assignment #6 (critical thinking)

Note: if you already completed the first five reading response assignments, you are not required to complete this assignment, and if you submit anyway, your submission will not be graded.

Pick one of the prompts listed below. Your response should be **500–700 words**. Please attach it as a **PDF** (**not** .pages, .doc, etc.) through Canvas.

OPTION 1 (the ethics of AI)

Suppose that functionalism is true about intentionality (representational states that are not essentially experiential, such as belief, desire, etc.), while the mind–brain identity theory is true about phenomenal consciousness (states that are essentially experiential, such as pain, pleasure, etc.). This means that while Weak AI is possible, Strong AI is impossible. In other words, while it is possible to design a machine that is *sapient*, it is impossible to design a machine that is *sentient*. Now, suppose we build a machine that is functionally and behaviorally indistinguishable from an ordinary human being—call it Data. Given these earlier assumptions, Data has the capacity to believe that he may be terminated, to desire to continue existing, and perhaps even to refuse consent to being terminated. Nonetheless, from the inside, subjectively, Data is a complete “zombie”: *what it is like* to be Data is experientially indistinguishable from *what it is like* to be a rock—there is *nothing* that it is like (experientially) to be these things.

Data’s designers stand to make a profit by terminating Data and selling his parts to other AI researchers. When asked if this is okay, Data apparently protests, outputting English sentences such as, “No, I do not want to die!”

Use the following question as the basis for your submission:

1. Would it be wrong for Data’s designers to terminate Data for a profit? Why or why not?

(If you’re having trouble meeting the word count, consider and respond to an objection.)

OPTION 2 (the ethics of suicide)

Philosopher Brian Stoffell reports that during the September 11 attacks in New York City, “Unparalleled real-time, worldwide television coverage was given to the destruction of the World Trade Center. A part of that catastrophe was the choice of death by suicide for some 200 people who leapt from the Towers. Many, faced with the horror of being consumed in an inferno, chose an end considered less awful” (312).

On the face of it, many terminally ill patients find themselves in a similar situation. They face the choice of waiting to die a slow and painful death from their illness or else committing suicide and dying a seemingly less worse death. Nonetheless, while few would condemn those people who chose to jump from the Towers, many would criticize a terminally ill patient for choosing to commit suicide. Indeed, some might view the one decision as heroic and the other as cowardly. Yet, if there is no morally relevant difference between these two situations, one of these responses must be revised.

Use the following two questions as the basis for your submission:

1. Is there a morally relevant difference between these two situations (i.e., the choice that faced those people who leapt from the Towers and the choice that faces many of the terminally ill today)? Why or why not?
2. Should people's responses to either of these two situations be revised? If so, how? If not, why not?

OPTION 3 (the ethics of euthanasia)

Suppose that Bob meets all of the following criteria:

- he is suffering from a terminal illness;
- he is extremely unlikely to benefit from a medical discovery during what remains of his life expectancy;
- his illness is causing him to suffer intolerable pain;
- he has repeatedly expressed a voluntary and competent wish to die in order to avoid the symptoms of his illness;
- he is unable to end his life without assistance.

Bob begs his physician to end his life, and his physician responds by administering a lethal dose of barbiturates, killing him.

Use the following question as the basis for your submission:

1. Was it morally permissible for Bob's physician to kill him? Why or why not?

(If you're having trouble meeting the word count, consider and respond to an objection.)