

Phil 151
Philosophy of Neuroscience
Spring 2023

Course Paper Assignment

Your course paper should address topics raised in the readings in the units on Explanation and Representation. In the paper you should articulate a thesis and defend it. Below I have posed three questions that arise from this material. (If you find another question stemming from the readings that you prefer to address, consult with me.) These are not exam questions, but rather intended to suggest a range of possible theses. You should formulate a specific question on which you should take a position (your thesis) and argue for it by using the material in the assigned reading. You should restrict yourself to a specific question and actively engage at least one (and, except in exceptional circumstances, no more than one) of the assigned readings beyond the Bechtel and Huang book; you may use the reading either to support your thesis or as a foil against which you will argue in defending your thesis.

It is important that you make it clear both what your thesis is and how the material you present supports it. Your paper should include whatever is needed to defend your thesis—no more and no less. Don't assume your reader will figure out what your thesis is and how the things you say support it—make it clear. And remember that a title is your first opportunity to direct your reader's attention to what you are doing in the paper.

The overall evaluation of your paper will reflect both how interesting your thesis is and how well you defend it. Be aware of the page limit—this is to be a short paper, 3-5 pages double-spaced (900 to 1500 words). Do not get so ambitious that you would need 10-20 pages to do what you set out to do. You will be better off narrowing your thesis and developing your argument in detail rather than pursuing a very broad issue superficially.

Write your paper for an intelligent audience, but do not assume that they have been in this class or read what you have read. Therefore, you need to explain the relevant material to your audience, not just make allusions to it and assume your audience will understand.

You may ask others to read your paper and give feedback, but the writing is to be your own.

Submit your paper electronically to the following email address (papers@mechanism.ucsd.edu) in MS Word or .rtf format (NOT PDF). Please be sure that you do not have any computer viruses before submitting (I hope you don't have any other kind either). It is due by 5PM on Friday, May 26 (note, this is not a class day).

1. Is network analysis a replacement for or a complement to mechanistic explanation?
2. Are neuroscientific explanations of behavior/cognition reductionistic? If they are/were, would that be problematic?
3. Is characterizing processes in the brain as representations of things and activities outside it purely for the convenience of neuroscientists or do brains traffic in representations?