



The Philosophy in Schools Association of NSW
invites NSW secondary students to submit an essay to our second annual
2020 Essay Competition,
proudly sponsored by the **Royal Society of NSW Southern Highlands**

This packet contains the competition rules (below), the stimulus material (pages 2-3), the marking criteria (page 4), and submission form (page 5).

- Submissions will be judged by an assessing panel of (unpaid) academic philosophers.
- The three best will be selected, plus honourable mentions for up to three more deserving entries.
- Awards will be presented June 20th at North Sydney Girls High School (Further details TBA).

Competition Rules

1. Entrants must be in Years 10-12 and in full time secondary students at a NSW school (public, private or Catholic). (Students in higher education may not enter.)
2. Each entrant may submit one essay only addressing the set philosophical topic.
3. Essays must not exceed 2000 words.
4. The essay must be entirely the student's own work. Any form of unfair practice (including plagiarism) will disqualify the entrant from the competition.
5. Submissions must be in the form of Word documents in the following format:
 - a. Font size 12 in a typeset of Calibri, Courier or Times New Roman
 - b. Line spacing 1.5 between lines
 - c. Italics for foreign/specialist words, bold for emphasis
 - d. Footnotes should be used, rather than endnotes, if they are required.
6. The submission must be accompanied by a completed Submission Form which must be signed by the entrant, one of their teachers and a parent/caregiver. (The form can be found on Page 5 of this document.) The submission form and essay should be attached separately to a single email, sent to philosophyinschoolsnsw@gmail.com
7. No more than 3 submissions can be made per school.
8. Submissions received after the due date (Tuesday May 26 at 5:00pm AEST) will not be considered.



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Stimulus

Who am I? Who Am I *really*?

This is a question each of us may ask ourselves. How does the way we answer the question and the answer we give to it relate to anyone else's pursuit and answer of the question? And then, to what extent should *my* question relate to *you* asking the same question of yourself? Are our two questions related? Is the question each of us may ask of ourselves related to every other such question asked by every other individual? Do we need to take each other into account and how? Given that we ask the question using the public means of language, which is not all our own, and yet in another sense it is, given that, how may the question we ask of ourselves really differ from the others in our language group? And those outside our language group, how "foreign" are they? How foreign am I to myself?

Socrates, according to Plato at the start of Western philosophy said, Know thyself, pretty much as a basis for knowing anything else. I mean, if you do not know yourself, something you already are and do not need to seek and find, then how can you claim you know anything else, that is *not you*? Because who is it that knows? Or what?

This is the philosophical question of identity. The subject overlaps with religion, science, psychology, as well as pop culture.

Religion

On the road to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say I am?" (Mt. 16: 13f). Their answer was that the people had either a sense of mistaken identity (John the Baptist) or that Jesus was a reincarnation of one of the major prophets (Elijah, Jeremiah). There were various ideas about who he was that have continued all through history.

There is a story in Buddhism that goes like this: The emperor, who was a devout Buddhist, invited a great Zen master to the Palace in order to ask him questions about Buddhism. "What is the highest truth of the holy Buddhist doctrine?" the emperor inquired.

"Vast emptiness... and not a trace of holiness," the master replied.

"If there is no holiness," the emperor said, "then who or what are you?"

"I do not know," the master replied.

Science

Modern rational philosophy has formulated the question of identity into what it calls "the mind-body problem", a subject-object problem. Can science identify identity and say what it is? How is science going about this task?

Psychology

Philosopher Michel Foucault, Pierre Hadot and others have said philosophy originally was *care of the self*. How does “care of self” relate to identity? Are we caring for our identity in caring for the self, or creating it? And does that stance make philosophy narcissistic (self-serving)? There is obviously a history of this whole question.

Where did the soul go? What did people used to mean by the word “soul”? Anything? If the soul is just an old fashioned word for the mind, as some claim, then could we also say that the mind an old fashioned word for the brain? Is the pop neuroscience approach to identity a lab-rat approach to being human? What mother thinks of her baby like that? Or what father? And if we are chemical puppets, morality loses real meaning. The conundrum then becomes the old one of determinism vs freewill, which has religious origins.

What about crowds? A number of 20th c. writers starting with Freud wrote about how as soon as we get in a crowd we take on a mass identity (Freud, Mass Psychology). Nazism proved his point. But we might think of footy crowds and groups where individual identity is submerged in a larger identity and group-think.

Popular Culture

Today, on social media we construct an image of ourselves which may or may not be a good reflection, but reflection of what? Modern psychology has split the self between the conscious and the unconscious, and claims each of us are shot through with drives that are impersonal, even if we mistake them as personal and “ours”, but where does that leave us? In therapy forever? Self-help literature on the other hand claims we can get our lives together and be happy and successful, but on whose terms?

Movies of Shakespeare plays are readily available online. *Hamlet* by Shakespeare is much ado about the question of identity. Gender, sexuality and identity is a theme of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. Identity is a major theme right through Shakespeare in fact.

(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304231714_Identity_in_Shakespeare) . More up to date, there are plenty of “coming of age” films and TV series that delve into the question of personal identity. The South Korean TV drama, *Who Are You: School 2015* is about what can happen when one person takes on the identity of another. *To the Beautiful You* (2012) is about a girl who dresses as a boy and attends an elite boy’s boarding school causing a lot of confusion between role and instinct. Many Korean dramas explore identity issues. All coming-of-age movies are about identity and if you google it you get all sorts of lists of suggestions, from the best of all time, to the best recent. An essay in the area of film and popular culture is a possibility.

Essayists may take any approach to the question they like. The marker is looking for the way the question is scoped and explored in depth. Scoping means a good contextualization of the problem, perhaps with some rationale for why you are taking a particular tack and not another. Scoping is like mapping the terrain the essay will travel over. Exploring in depth means getting under the surface of the issues and problems you identify in the topic. Exploring in depth is like stopping and getting to know the history and peculiarities of all the major sights on the way across that terrain. Essayists are encouraged to use the tools of inquiry in their writing: for instance using examples to elaborate, ensuring their justification and evaluations are considered and avoiding overgeneralisations and fallacious reasoning.



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Marking Criteria

Submissions will be evaluated based on their critical engagement, synthesis of ideas, and written expression using the criteria below:

Range	Criteria
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding, perceptive and sophisticated response which exhibits coherence and cohesion • Engages critically with key thinkers, arguments and issues in this field • Expresses perceptive ideas with clarity / skill / originality
B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively explores / discusses the philosophical problem of identity • Shows understanding of key thinkers, arguments and issues in this field • Expresses ideas effectively in relation to the stimulus
C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a discussion and/or description of the problem of identity • Makes relevant reference to key thinkers, arguments and issues in this field • Expresses ideas competently
D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempts to discuss the concept of identity • Shows some awareness of thinkers, arguments and issues in this field • Expresses ideas in a variable manner
E	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes or refers to the topic 'identity' • Shows limited awareness of relevant thinkers, arguments and issues • Expresses ideas in a confused or limited manner



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Submission form

School _____ Year group _____

Student name _____

Teacher's name _____

The signatures below constitute a pledge that all of the writing is the student's own work,
with the exception of those portions which are properly documented.

Student signature _____ Date _____

Teacher's signature _____ Date _____

We the undersigned give permission for essays to be published by the Philosophy of Schools
Association of NSW and/or the Royal Society of the Southern Highlands in print newsletters
and/or online.

Student signature _____ Date _____

Student's Parent name _____

Student's Parent signature _____ Date _____

We the undersigned give permission for the student's name and image to be circulated in
print newsletters and/or online

Student signature _____ Date _____

Student's Parent name _____

Student's Parent signature _____ Date _____