

Philosophy 250: The Minds of Robots and Other People

Tu-Th 10:45-12:00, PA 317

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Office Hours MWF 12:00-2:00 and by appointment

1. Course description. The title of this course may be misleading. Consider the following line of reasoning: throughout history, there have been humans who, for whatever reasons, have been denied the status of persons (slaves, for example). The decision to extend the concept of personhood to embrace such groups invariably involves the judgement that their members are just like us in all the ways that count, and different only in ways irrelevant to their personhood (e.g. skin color). Now, there is a strong intuition that all that really matters when deciding such issues is that the entity in question have a mind. Therefore, if we accept the premise implicit in the title of this course, "The Minds of People and Robots," we would have to accept that robots are, in some sense, people, and in that case, the course should really be titled simply, "The Minds of People."

It is for this reason that this course is taught by a philosopher, not a roboticist. Hard as it is to speculate on the future course of technological innovation, our contemplation of the question, "Could a robot have a mind (be a person)?" tells us less about robots than it does about ourselves. It raises the further, more disturbing questions: What does it mean to have a mind? What is a mind? How does a mind work? These further questions will be the primary focus of our course.

2. Readings. The following titles have been ordered by the University Bookstore. Additional readings will be placed on reserve in the Fairchild-Martindale library as needed.

René Descartes, Meditations (Cambridge)

P. Churchland, Matter and Consciousness (MIT) **MAC**

John Haugeland, Mind Design II (MIT) **MD**

Block, Flanagan, and Güzeldere, The Nature of Consciousness (MIT) **NC**

Rudy Rucker, Software (Avon)

3. Course requirements.

This course will be conducted as an advanced philosophy seminar. Accordingly, students are expected to attend all classes, and to participate in discussions; 10% of your grade will reflect in-class contributions. Along with three other students, you will be expected

to produce a group project, to consist in a six-to-eight-page written report (15%) and an oral presentation in class (10%). Projects will be structured around, but not limited to one or more readings assigned for a given week, with oral presentations to be made that week. Written reports will be due the following week. **Guidelines for group projects will be distributed, and should be followed carefully.** Two short papers will be assigned over the course of the semester. The first (25%), due on Oct. 8, should be five to seven pages in length, and the second (30%), due Dec. 3, seven to ten pages. A short take-home final, assigned on the last day of class and due on Dec. 10, will be worth 15%. Grades will be assigned on a 100-point scale, though the maximum possible score is 105%. Late papers will be penalized four points per day late; **absolutely no** late finals will be accepted.

I really hate to have to say this on the syllabus for such an advanced course, but sad experience has proved it necessary. The minimum sanction for any student found to have committed plagiarism on any assignment will be **a failing grade for the entire course** (not just the assignment). A report will also be made to the Dean of Students for possible further disciplinary action. If you are uncertain as to what constitutes plagiarism, please consult your Student Handbook (under the heading "Academic Dishonesty"), or come see me.

4. Schedule of readings and assignments.

Week of:

Readings and assignments:

The Mind-Body Problem and Related Metaphysical Issues

Aug. 25	René Descartes, <u>Meditations</u> I-III
Sep. 1	MAC , Ch. 1-2.
Sep. 8	NC , Ch. 4, 26.
Sep. 15	NC , Ch. 27, 6.
Sep. 22	MD , Ch. 2, 3.
Sep. 29	Rudy Rucker, <u>Software</u> ; MD , Ch. 7.
Oct. 6	MD , Ch. 10, 13. Oct. 8: First Paper Due.
Oct. 15	NC , Ch. 11, 12, 14.. No class Tuesday, October 13 (Pacing Break).

Oct. 20 NC, Ch. 33-34

The Problem of Other Minds and Related Epistemological Issues

Oct. 27 MAC, Ch. 4.

Nov. 3 NC, Ch. 30, 32

Nov. 10 Ape signing literature (on reserve)

Advanced Topics

Nov. 17 Qualia: NC, Ch. 41-44.

Nov. 24 AI: MD, Ch. 4-5, 9. No class Nov. 26
(Thanksgiving)

Dec. 1 TBA. **Thursday, Dec. 3: Second papers due in class. Take-home finals will be distributed at the end of class, and are due in the philosophy department at noon on Dec. 10 (no late papers accepted)**