Minds and Machines, PHIL 250 - 001

Summer Term 1, 2021
Meetings on Monday and Wednesday, 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Instructor
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Course Description
What is a human mind? In an attempt to answer this question, many philosophers and cognitive scientists maintain that the human mind is, in some important sense, a computer. In this course, we will introduce and assess this view. In particular, we will try to figure out to which extent this seemingly metaphorical claim can help us explain how humans think, feel, and apprehend the world. This will then lead us to explore questions as to whether machines can have minds too, and whether they can be conscious. There are no prerequisites for this course and no prior experience with philosophy will be assumed.

Learning Outcomes
On successful completion of this course, you will have:
- Engaged critically with texts pertaining to the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of cognitive science
- Developed the ability to construct an argument and defend a thesis
- Come to appreciate the difficulties in explaining some features of the mind scientifically, and the advantages and disadvantages of using the computational theory of the mind to overcome these difficulties
- Acquired knowledge of philosophical issues relevant to assessing whether machines can be conscious

Reading Materials
We will be relying largely on these two books:
- Crane, Tim, 2016, *The Mechanical Mind: A Philosophical Introduction to Minds, Machines and Mental Representation* (3rd edition), Routledge, NY: New York.
- Schneider, Susan, 2019, *Artificial You: AI and the Future of Your Mind*, Princeton University Press, NJ: Princeton.

All readings — including these two books — will be made available online via course reserve.

Course format
Because of COVID-19, this course will be entirely online. Its format will be a blend of pre-recorded (asynchronous) video lectures, and mandatory Zoom (synchronous) meetings. In general, I will aim to convene a synchronous meeting on each Monday and Wednesday of the term (except May 24th). I will make available a 50-minute pre-recorded lecture around 24 hours before each meeting, which students will be expected to have watched before joining the synchronous meeting. More details on the course format will be given on the first class.

Assessment

Your grade for the course will be based on:
- Participation in synchronous meetings (10%)
- Reaction essays due before every class (20%)
- A midterm take-home essay of around 1000 words (30%)
- A final take-home essay of around 2000 words (40%)

Reaction essays are brief written reactions to the readings. The point of the essay is to have an immediate opportunity to describe, criticize, and generally engage with the readings. The content of the essay can be a summary of the main point, a reconstruction of the main argument, a criticism, a well-formulated question, etc.

The two take-home essays are meant to be critical papers, not merely expository. That means that you will not merely show understanding of the material, but also critically engage with the topic by producing original arguments and observations.

Reading Schedule

Please note that this schedule may change at the instructor's discretion to suit the pace of the course and the interests of the students. Please also note that all readings are to be read **before** the date listed.

Week 1
Monday, May 10th   Crane 2016 — Chapter 2
Wednesday, May 12th   Crane 2016 — Chapter 3

Week 2
Monday, May 17th   Crane 2016 — Chapter 4
Wednesday, May 19th   Crane 2016 — Chapter 6

Week 3
Monday, May 24th   *No Class - Victoria Day*
Wednesday, May 26th   Crane 2016 — Chapter 7, along with Sections 8.1 and 8.2

Week 4
Monday, May 31st   Crane 2016 — Section 8.3, along with Chapter 9
Wednesday, June 2nd   Heyes, Cecilia, 2008, "Beast machines? Questions of animal consciousness" in *Frontiers in Consciousness*

Week 5
Monday, June 7th   Schneider 2019 — Chapters 2-3
Wednesday June 9th   Schneider 2019 — Chapter 4

Week 6
Monday June 14th   Schneider 2019 — Chapters 5-6
Wednesday June 16th   Schneider 2019 — Chapter 8

Accessibility
Academic accommodations help students with a disability or ongoing medical condition overcome challenges that may affect their academic success. Students requiring academic accommodations must register with the Centre for Accessibility (previously known as Access & Diversity). The Centre will determine that student's eligibility for accommodations in accordance with Policy 73: Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities. Academic accommodations are not determined by your instructors, and instructors should not ask you about the nature of your disability or ongoing medical condition, or request copies of your disability documentation. However, your instructor may consult with the Centre for Accessibility should the accommodations affect the essential learning outcomes of a course.

Please note that you are welcome to discuss accessibility related accommodations with me without official documentation and I will make every effort to accommodate.

UBC Values Statement
UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available here: https://senate.ubc.ca/policies-resources-support-student-success

Plagiarism
Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments.Here is the link to the UBC Calendar entry on Academic Misconduct:
http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,959

Academic citation
There is no required citation method for this course. Please feel free to use whichever method you are most comfortable with. Here is UBC's guide on citation:
http://help.library.ubc.ca/evaluating-and-citing-sources/how-to-cite/