

PHIL 250.001: Minds and Machines
University of British Columbia
2021 – 2022, Term One
Mon/Wed/Fri, 2:00 – 2:50 PM

Instructor: Dr. Thomas Bittner
Email: tbittner@mail.ubc.ca
Office hours: Tue/Thu 10 – 10:50 AM,
and by appointment

Teaching Assistant:
Email:
Office hours: by appointment only

Course Outline

Course Description:

This course provides an introduction to some of the central issues in the philosophy of mind. Among other questions, we will ask whether it would be possible for machines, such as computers and robots, to think; what it is for you and I, in thinking, to represent objects and states of affairs in the world; and what the prospects are for the sciences to produce an adequate account of our mental lives. Although we will spend some time on computers and how they operate, we will also consider the possibility that the human brain or mind is already, in some sense, a kind of machine.

Texts, etc.:

Tim Crane (2016). *The Mechanical Mind*, 3rd ed. Routledge.
Required and optional readings and other media, available on or through UBC Canvas.

Course Requirements:

There will be two exams, a short writing assignment, and a recorded presentation. The mid-term exam will be taken during class; the final exam will be taken during the final exam period. Your mark for the course will depend on:

- The mid-term exam [20%]
- The short writing assignment [20%]
- A five-minute recorded presentation [10%]
- The final exam [30%]
- Your overall class involvement [20%].

Students will choose the material they present on and presentations may be either individual projects or two-person group projects. Class involvement is composed of attendance and contributions to class discussion (both in-class and online).

Course Policies:¹

There is a grade penalty for late writing assignments. Exams must be taken at their scheduled times. Only medical or religious reasons will be accepted for missing a deadline. Students will not ordinarily be excused for work-, travel-, childcare-, or sports-related activity.

¹ Some of the wording in this section of the course outline has been taken from the materials written for other courses I have taught, UBC Senate policy V-130, or Arts internal resources.

Should an emergency arise, you must contact me by email before the deadline to avoid receiving a grade penalty for lateness.

If you miss marked coursework (assignment, exam, presentation, participation in class) and believe you may qualify for an in-term concession (ITC) (and you are an Arts student), review the Faculty of Arts' [academic concession page](#) and then complete Arts Academic Advising's [online academic concession form](#), so that an advisor can evaluate your concession case. If you are a student in a different Faculty, please consult [your Faculty's webpage on academic concession](#), and then contact me where appropriate.

Plagiarism is the use of another person's words or ideas without proper citation. It causes the reader to believe wrongly that these words or ideas are your own. Plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct, such as cheating on an exam, will not be tolerated. I will assume that you are familiar with the rules governing plagiarism and cheating and that you know how to make proper use of sources. If you have any questions on this, please see me or visit:

<http://learningcommons.ubc.ca/academic-integrity/>

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/policiesresources-support-student-success>

Learning Objectives

Students will improve their ability to read and write about philosophical issues. They will gain a basic understanding of the major issues in the field of philosophy of mind.

Advice and Expectations:

Try very hard to keep up with the assigned class readings on our schedule. Read and take notes on the article or chapter assigned for each class meeting.

This is philosophy, so nearly all of the material is contested ground. You should aim to think critically about, and not just to memorize the material. What is valued in this course is clarity and strength of argument. I have my own views on the issues we'll be covering, but I don't expect you to agree with me all the time. I only expect you to show me that you understand the views of those with whom you agree or disagree and to express and defend your own views clearly and persuasively.

Copyright

All materials of this course (course handouts, lecture slides, assessments, course readings, etc.) are the intellectual property of the Course Instructor(s) or licensed to be used in this course by the copyright owner. Redistribution of these materials by any means without permission of the copyright holder(s) constitutes a breach of copyright and may lead to academic discipline.

Schedule of Topics and Readings
MM = Tim Crane (2016) *The Mechanical Mind*, 3rd ed., Routledge

○ = required

❖ = optional

Week 1, Sept 6, Labour Day (no class meeting)

Week 1, Sept. 8 and 10

- Mind and knowledge
 - René Descartes (1641) *Meditations* (First and Second)
http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/cartes1641_1.pdf
 - Jennifer Nagel (2016) “The Problem of Skepticism”
<https://youtu.be/PqjdRAERWlc>

Week 2, Sept. 13, 15, and 17

- Virtual Reality
 - Robert Nozick (1971) “The Experience Machine” in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*
<https://philosophy.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/The%20Experience%20Machine%20-%20Robert%20Nozick.pdf>
 - ❖ Wachowski Brothers (1999) *The Matrix*
 - Jim Prior (2003) “What’s So Bad About Living in the Matrix?”
<http://www.uky.edu/~mwa229/PryorWhatSoBadAboutLivingInTheMatrix.pdf>
 - Hilary Putnam (1981) “Brains in a Vat,” Chapter 1 in *Reason, Truth, and History*

Week 3, Sept. 20, 22, and 24

- Minds and representation
 - *MM*, Chapters 1, 2 and 3
 - John Haugeland (1996) “What is Mind Design?” § 1

Week 4, Sept. 27, 29, and Oct. 1

- Minds and science
 - *MM*, Chapters 4 and 5
 - Patricia Churchland (2018) “What is Eliminative Materialism?”
<https://youtu.be/xrFqhOvNtWM>

Week 5, Oct. 4 and 6

- Computation
 - *MM*, Chapter 6
 - John Haugeland (1996) “What is Mind Design?” §§ 2 and 3

Week 5, Oct. 8, Midterm exam (in class)

Week 6, Oct. 11, Thanksgiving Day (no class meeting)

Week 6, Oct. 13 and 15

- Artificial intelligence
 - *MM*, Chapter 7
 - Liquid logic gates
<https://gfyat.com/rashmassiveammonite>
 - ❖ Donald Davidson (1990) “Turing’s Test”
 - ❖ Hubert Dreyfus (2007) “Why Heideggerian A.I. Failed”

Week 7, Oct. 18, 20, and 22

- Artificial intelligence (continued)
 - *MM*, Chapter 8, §§ 8.1 and 8.4
 - Paul M. Churchland (1990) “Cognitive Activity in Artificial Neural Networks”
 - ❖ Cameron Buckner (2019) “Deep Learning: A Philosophical Introduction”
 - ❖ Artificial Neural Networks
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aircAruvnKk>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHZwWFHWa-w>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llg3gGewQ5U>

Week 8, Oct. 25, 27 and 29

- The symbol-grounding problem
 - Fred Dretske (1998) “Minds, Machines, and Money”
 - ❖ *MM*, Chapters 9 and 10
 - ❖ Karen Neander (1996) “Swampman Meets Swampcow”

Week 9, Nov. 1, 3, and 5

- Semantic externalism
 - *MM*, Chapter 11, §§ 11.1 and 11.2
 - Hilary Putnam (1973) “Meaning and Reference”

Week 9, Nov. 5, Short Writing Assignment due

Week 10 – 11, Nov. 8, 15, 17, and 19

- The extended mind
 - *MM*, Chapter 11, §§ 11.3, 11.4, and 11.5
 - Kim Sterelny (2010) “Minds: Extended or Scaffolded?”
 - ❖ H.G. Wells (1898) “The War of the Worlds,” Book Two: “The Earth under the Martians,” Chapter II: “What We Saw from the Ruined House”
 - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/36/36-h/36-h.htm>

Week 10, Nov. 10 – 12, Midterm Break and Remembrance Day (No class meetings)

Week 11 – 12, Nov. 22, 24, and 26

- Telepresence
 - ❖ Daniel Dennett (1978) “Where Am I?”
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP7rTp2vwTs&t=1277s>
 - Andy Clark (2007) “A Sense of Presence”
 - ❖ E.M. Forster (1909) “The Machine Stops”
 - ❖ H.G. Wells (1895) “The Remarkable Case of Davidson’s Eyes”

Week 12, Nov. 29, Dec. 1 and 3

- Robots
 - William James (1909) “Automatic Sweetheart,” in *The Meaning of Truth*
 - <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5117/5117-h/5117-h.htm>
 - Terrel Miedaner (1977) “The Soul of the Mark III Beast”
 - <http://www.uky.edu/~mwa229/SoulMarkIIIBeast.pdf>
 - ❖ L. Frank Baum (1907) “Ozma of Oz”
 - <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/33361>
 - Gareth B. Matthews (1977) “Consciousness and Life”

Week 14, Dec. 6

- Catch up and review

Dec. 11 – Dec. 22: Final Exam (TBD)