

PHIL 250.002: Minds and Machines  
University of British Columbia  
2023 – 2024, Term 2  
Mon/Wed/Fri, 12:00 – 12:50 PM  
BUCH, room A103

Instructor: Thomas Bittner  
Email: [tbittner@mail.ubc.ca](mailto:tbittner@mail.ubc.ca)  
Office hours: on Zoom  
Tue/Thu 11:00 – 11:50 AM,  
and by appointment

Teaching Assistant:  
Email: @gmail.com

## 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 various cognitive 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*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Routledge.  
Required and optional readings and other media are available on or through UBC Canvas.

### Course Requirements:

There will be two exams, one short writing assignment, and a brief recorded presentation. The mid-term exam will be taken during class on February 7; the final exam will be taken during the final exam period (April 16 – 27). The writing assignment is due on March 11. The recorded presentation may be submitted any time between the start and end of classes: January 8 through April 12.

- Mid-term exam [25%]
- Writing assignment [20%]
- Recorded presentation [15%]
- Final exam [30%]
- Overall course involvement [10%].

Students will choose the material they cover in their recorded presentation, and presentations may be either individual projects or two-person group projects.

Course involvement is composed of in-class activities and contributions to class discussion. Class discussion takes place during class and on Piazza (through Canvas).

## Course Policies: <sup>1</sup>

There is a grade penalty for late writing assignments (10% per day). 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. 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 (exam, writing assignment, presentation, or 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, in general. They will gain a basic understanding of some 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.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## COVID-19 Safety:

It is recommended to wear a non-medical mask during our class meetings, for your own protection and the safety and comfort of everyone else in the class. For our in-person meetings in this class, it is important that all of us feel as comfortable as possible engaging in class activities while sharing an indoor space. Non-medical masks that cover our noses and mouths are a primary tool for combating the spread of COVID-19. There may be students who have medical accommodations for not wearing a mask. Please maintain a respectful environment.

If you are sick, it is important that you stay at home. Complete a self-assessment for COVID-19 symptoms here: <https://bc.thrive.health/covid19/en>.

If you miss class because of illness, consult the course materials on Canvas to keep up or catch up with readings and assignments. Use the "Discussion" function on Canvas to ask questions. Attend online office hours for further help.

If I am unwell or isolating to protect others, I will not attend class in person. I will let you know by email or Canvas announcement as soon as possible. If I do not attend class in person, the class may still meet by Zoom, on Canvas.

### Schedule of Topics and Readings

**MM = Tim Crane (2016) *The Mechanical Mind*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Routledge**

○ = required

❖ = optional

Week 1, Jan. 8, 10, and 12

- Mind and knowledge
  - René Descartes (1641) *Meditations* (First and Second)  
[http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1641\\_1.pdf](http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1641_1.pdf)
  - Jennifer Nagel (2016) "The Problem of Skepticism"  
<https://youtu.be/PqjdRAERWLC>

Week 2, Jan. 15, 17, and 19

- 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>
  - ❖ The Wachowskis (1999) *The Matrix*
  - Jim Pryor (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, Jan. 22, 24, and 26

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

Week 4, Jan. 29, 31, and Feb. 2

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

Week 5, Feb. 5

- Computation
  - *MM*, Chapter 6

**Week 5, Feb. 7, Midterm exam (in class)**

Week 5, Feb. 9

- Computation
  - John Haugeland (1996) “What is Mind Design?” §§ 2 and 3

Week 6, Feb. 12, 14, and 16

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

**Feb. 19, Family Day (no class meeting)**

**Feb. 19 through 23, Midterm Break (no class meeting)**

Week 7, Feb. 26, 29, and Mar 1

- 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, Mar. 4, 6, and 8

- The symbol-grounding problem
  - Fred Dretske (1998) “Minds, Machines, and Money”
  - ❖ *MM*, Chapters 9 and 10
  - ❖ Deborah J. Brown (1993) “Swampman of La Mancha”
  - ❖ Karen Neander (1996) “Swampman Meets Swampcow”

**Week 9, Mar. 11, Writing Assignment due**

Week 9, Mar. 11, 13, and 15

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

Week 10, Mar. 18, 20, and 22

- The extended mind
  - *MM*, Chapter 11, §§ 11.3, 11.4, and 11.5

Week 11, Nov. 25, and 27

- The scaffolded mind
  - 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 11, Mar. 29, Good Friday (no class meeting)**

**Week 12, Apr. 1, Easter Monday (no class meeting)**

Week 12, Apr. 3 and 5

- 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 13, Apr. 8, 10, and 12

- 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”  
<https://junkerhq.net/MGS2/MarkIII.html>
  - ❖ L. Frank Baum (1907) “Ozma of Oz”  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/33361>
  - Gareth B. Matthews (1977) “Consciousness and Life”

**Apr. 16 – 27: Final Exam (TBD)**

#### 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.