INLS 490
THE IDEA OF AI

Instructor: Dr. Fox
Email: foxm@unc.edu
Room: Manning 303
Schedule: M/W 1:25-2:40pm
Office: Zoom and Manning 023
Office Hours: By appointment, preferably sometime between 2:45 and 4:45pm on Wednesdays

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course revolves around the very idea of artificial intelligence, or AI. It covers such topics as: intelligence, understanding, and intentionality in the context of AI and various types thereof; speculative philosophy and ethics of AI given relaxed definitions of these concepts; the philosophical implications of merging with AI; and the creative representation of AI in literature and film. We will engage with leading philosophers and ethicists in the field, both contemporary and historical, reflect on stories by Isaac Asimov and Harlan Ellison, and critique the films *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Her*. We will also explore what some consider to be myths about AI. Overall, this course will teach you how to think critically about AI from philosophical, ethical, and imaginative perspectives.

TEXTS

All readings for this course are available under Course Reserves on Canvas.

REQUIREMENTS (AND GRADE DISTRIBUTION)

Participate (20%)

This course will be conducted as a seminar, so your attendance and participation in class discussion will be integral to its success. Please come to class well-prepared to discuss the readings. You’ll submit to a Canvas discussion board a brief response to that class period’s reading. Unless I give you a prompt, your response should be a relatively substantial summary of the reading along with a reference to something about the reading that you’d like to delve into more during class.

Your participation grade will be based mostly on the quality of your posts on Canvas and of your commentary in class. Try to have something to say each class period.

I’ll provide participation grades at the end of the semester.

Reflect (30%)

You’ll submit two short essays that will each philosophically or critically engage with one or more of the materials we’ll be studying. The first should be 4 pages, the second 5 pages, and
both double-spaced and in 12-point font. Feel free to run your ideas for your philosophical or critical arguments by me at any time.

**Write (40%)**

For your term paper, you have several options:

1) An extended philosophical or critical engagement of a topic from the course or a related topic

2) A well-researched magazine article in the style of an article from Nautilus Magazine that addresses some aspect of the current or future state of AI and its philosophical, ethical, or cultural implications

3) A critical essay on the representation of AI in literature or film that addresses philosophical, ethical, or other cultural concerns

The length requirement for undergrads is 6-8 double-spaced pages (in 12-point font), and for graduate students it is 8-10 double-spaced pages (in 12-point font).

**Present (10%)**

At the end of the semester, you’ll present a lightning talk, about 5 minutes long, on your working term paper.

**GRADING SCALE**

**Undergraduate**

A 93-100  
A- 90-92  
B+ 88-89  
B 83-87  
B- 80-82  
C+ 78-79  
C 73-77  
C- 70-72  
D+ 68-69  
D 63-67  
D- 60-62  
F < 60

**Graduate**

H – High Pass  
P – Pass  
L – Low Pass  
F – Fail  
I – Incomplete
HONOR CODE

Your full participation in and observance of the University’s Honor Code are expected. You are expected to do your own work. You may not use chatbots or other AI technology to assist you with your coding or writing. And you are not permitted to upload any content from this course to the web in any form, including but not limited to Chegg, Course Hero, Coursera, Google Drive, etc. If you post course content, you may be violating my intellectual property rights. If you post your own work from this course, you are allowing sites to profit from your intellectual property. In utilizing web sources to upload or download course content, you risk violating the University’s Honor Code.

As per UNC policy, students may not record a class on their own, in any format, without prior express authorization from the University and the instructor, and they may not copy, reproduce or distribute any recording that they access. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact Accessibility Resources & Service. Students may not upload to the web or otherwise distribute or publish any recordings they may be authorized to make.

ACCESSIBILITY RESOURCES AND SERVICE

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities. Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information (https://ars.unc.edu) or email ars@unc.edu.

MISCELLANEOUS

I may make changes to the syllabus as necessary over the course of the semester.

SCHEDULE

A * indicates a due date.

### Unit 1: “Intelligence” in Artificial Intelligence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 10</td>
<td>Overview and Introductions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 15</td>
<td>No class (MLK Day)</td>
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<td>Jan. 17</td>
<td>The Turing Test</td>
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<td>Turing. “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” <em>PEAI</em></td>
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<td>Jan. 22</td>
<td>The Chinese Room Thought Experiment 1</td>
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<td>Searle. “Minds, Brains, and Programs.” <em>PEAI</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 24</td>
<td>The Chinese Room Thought Experiment 2</td>
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| Jan. 29  | **Mind as Computer**  
Boden. “Escaping from the Chinese Room” *PEAI*  
Searle. “Is The Brain a Digital Computer?” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* |
| Jan. 31  | **The Frame Problem 1**  
Dennett, “Cognitive Wheels: The Frame Problem of AI.” *PEAI*  
Optional reading:  
| Feb. 5   | **The Frame Problem 2**  
| Feb. 7   | **Intelligence and Different Types of AI**  
Dreyfus, xxx-xlvi, *What Computers Still Can’t Do* |

**Unit 2: Speculative Philosophy of AI**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feb. 12</th>
<th>No class (Well-being Day)</th>
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| *Feb. 14 | **Superintelligence and the Singularity**  
Chalmers, “The Singularity: A Philosophical Analysis,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (only through page 24)  
*Philosophical/Critical Essay 1 due* |
| Feb. 19  | **The Singularity and the Computer Simulation Hypothesis**  
Bostrom, “Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?” *Philosophical Quarterly*  
Optional reading:  
Prinz, “Singularity and Inevitable Doom.” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* |
| Feb. 21  | **Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) and Existential Risk 1**  
Optional reading:  
Armstrong. “General Purpose Intelligence: Arguing the Orthogonality Thesis.” *Analysis and Metaphysics* |
| Feb. 26  | **Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) and Existential Risk 2**  
Häggström. “Challenges to the Omohundro–Bostrom Framework for AI Motivations.” *Foresight*  
Optional reading:  
Goertzel. “Superintelligence: Fears, Promises and Potentials.” *Journal of Evolution and Technology* |
| Feb. 28  | **Moral Status of AI 1**  
Mar. 4 | **Moral Status of AI 2**  
Optional reading:  
Michael LaBossiere (2017). Testing the Moral Status of Artificial Beings; or I’m Going to Ask You Some Questions.” *Robot Ethics 2.0: From Autonomous Cars to Artificial Intelligence*

Mar. 6 | **Ethical AI 1**  
Allen et al. “Prolegomena to Any Future Artificial Moral Agent.” *Journal of Experimental & Theoretical Artificial Intelligence*

Mar. 11 | No class (Spring Break)

Mar. 13 | No class (Spring Break)

Mar. 18 | **Ethical AI 2**  

**Unit 3: Merging with AI**

*Mar. 20 | **Artificial You 1**  
Schneider. Introduction-Chapter 2, *Artificial You*  
*Philosophical/Critical Essay 2 due*

Mar. 25 | **Artificial You 2**  
Schneider. Chapters 3–4, *Artificial You*

Mar. 27 | **Artificial You 3**  
Schneider. Chapters 5–7, *Artificial You*

Apr. 1 | **Artificial You 4**  
Schneider. Chapter 8 and Conclusion, *Artificial You*

Apr. 3 | **Workshop**  
Come prepared to discuss ideas for your term paper.

**Unit 4: AI in Literature and Film**

Apr. 8 | **Literature**  
Ellison, “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream.”

Apr. 10 | **Film 1**  
*2001: A Space Odyssey*

Apr. 15 | **Film 2**  
*2001: A Space Odyssey*

Apr. 17 | **Film 3**  
*Her*

Apr. 22 | **Film 4 (cont’d)**  
*Her*

**Unit 5: Presentations and Term Paper**

Apr. 24 | **Presentations 1**

Apr. 29 | **Presentations 2**

*May 1 | **Term Paper due***