Minds, Machines, & Persons
Spring, 2013
Instructor: Ronald Planer

Course Overview:

In this course, we will consider a number of central, longstanding questions in the philosophy of mind, philosophy of psychology, and foundations of cognitive science. For example, we will ask, *What is the nature of mental states? How do mental states come to be about things in the world? Can machines (e.g., computers) have mental states, can they think? Could a machine ever have consciousness?*

The first book we will use is Tim Crane's, "The Mechanical Mind". This will serve as an introduction to the standard or mainstream approach to the study of mentality. The guiding analogy here is that the mind is to the brain what software is to the hardware of a computer. This analogy is meant to be taken quite literally: the mind *is* a collection of computations carried out by a certain biological machine—the brain.

Then we will have a look at some of the same questions, but from a different perspective. To this end, we will use a fantastic new book by Lawrence Shapiro: "Embodied Cognition". We will want to ask what exactly the program of embodied cognition is, how it offers a challenge to mainstream theorizing about the mind, and in what its main strengths and weaknesses are.

In terms of course work: There will be a midterm and a final exam. You will also write a paper (probably about 10 pages, double-spaced). A more detailed syllabus will be posted in the near future.