

# A. I., ROBOTS, AND PEOPLE

AN INTRODUCTORY PHILOSOPHICAL EXAMINATION  
OF ARTIFICIAL & NATURAL INTELLIGENCE  
THROUGH FICTION &  
NON-FICTION

PHILOSOPHY 447.01 (ETS)

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CAN MACHINES HAVE  
A MENTAL LIFE?

WHAT IS IT ABOUT  
US THAT ACCOUNTS  
FOR OUR HAVING  
A MENTAL LIFE?



Some researchers believe that machines will eventually have genuine mental lives: they will see, think, believe, feel, desire, wonder, infer, investigate, etc. This does not mean that machines will merely *act* like they think, etc.; it means they *will* think, period. The underlying rationale is about us: the sole reason we can think is that we are computers of a sort. So examining the question "Could a computer think?", will involve examining the questions, "What accounts for our ability to think?" and "Is it that we are ourselves computers, albeit of a biological sort?" These questions will be our guides.

**Fiction & Tech Exercises:**  
We will use a Xerox packet with nonfiction in tandem with online short stories. Also, since 447 satisfies the ETS Discovery requirement, and since Classical AI is based on the idea that intelligence can be *programmed into computers*, there will be a gentle progressive series of very elementary programming exercises. This presupposes no prior technical knowledge or special aptitude—the programming method is very intuitive with only a few elementary concepts that children could learn. Despite the ease, an understanding of the rudiments of computation will be achieved.

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