

PHIL 159 Section 01: “Philosophy of Mind”

From Plants and Amoeba to Octopi and Orangutans to Humans and Robots

Tuesday & Thursday 13:30 to 14:45; Online; Fall 2021

Anand Jayprakash Vaidya

Anand.Vaidya@SJSU.EDU

<https://anandvaidya.weebly.com>



This course will be an introduction to the philosophy of mind from a cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary perspective. That means that we will be looking at what it is for an *entity* to have a mind by looking at literature from both western and non-western philosophy as well as the sciences, such as psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience. I will focus on three topics. Bi-directional brain-based illusionism is the view that the brain produces two illusions, the self, and consciousness. How plausible is this view of the nature of the self and consciousness for humans? Panpsychism is the view that *mind* or consciousness is fundamental and ubiquitous in nature. What is more plausible: (i) that there is a continuum of consciousness that takes us from plants through octopi and humans to robots, (ii) there is a plurality of kinds of consciousness that are unique in their own way, or (iii) that consciousness is an illusion? Third: does consciousness matter for the possession of moral rights, if not what does? To engage these issues, we need to think about the nature of illusions, intentionality, perception, emotion, empathy, attention, and consciousness.

We will begin by learning the basics of philosophy of mind, what are the main positions, debates, and arguments. The stuff you need to know to be competent. But after that we will focus down into the three areas. I am especially interested in 19th and 20th century American panpsychists, such as C. A. Strong and Drake Durant, medieval Indian panpsychists, such as Śaṅkara, and Rāmānuja, 17th to 19th century feminist philosophers of mind, such as Margret Cavendish and Ada Lovelace; and recent work on attention and consciousness at the forefront of AI.

- The main skills you will gain are the following: how to extract and analyze an argument, how to do research across many fields, how to build a research paper, how to comment on the work of another researcher.
- Grading will be done through weekly discussion posts, short writing assignments (3-4pages), and depending on time, presentations from students.
- Most readings will be available at the course website. But a book will also be made optional.
- There will be guest speakers from other universities. And I will also offer depth readings where smaller groups of students can meet with me to read something after class in more depth.