HUMANITY CENTERED ROBOTICS INITIATIVE

BROWN

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"Descartes' Challenge: Lessons for Human Robot Interaction from Animal Cognition"

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3-4pm
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Abstract: Descartes challenged his critics to say why we should credit intelligence to animals, which outperform humans on some tasks but not all. Few people today accept the hard divide between human and animal intelligence that Descartes supposed. Nevertheless Descartes' challenge highlights the problem of understanding and interacting with forms of intelligence that are less general than our own—including artificial intelligence and autonomous robotics, which are limited in similar ways to animals: extremely competent in some domains, but opaque to themselves and us. Futuristic thinkers believe that super-intelligent machines are just around the corner, but I believe that we are facing a relatively long period in which humans will need to adapt more quickly to the limitations of our machines than vice versa. I will draw out some implications of this asymmetry for the responsible design of socially responsive machines and discuss whether research in animal cognition can usefully inform the development of domesticatable machines.

Colin Allen is Provost Professor of Cognitive Science and of History & Philosophy of Science & Medicine in the College of Arts and Sciences at Indiana University, Bloomington. He is a faculty member of Indiana University's Center for the Integrative Study of Animal Behavior and the Program in Neuroscience, holds an adjunct appointment in the Department of Philosophy, and directs the Indiana Philosophy Ontology project (InPhO). From 2015 to 2018 Allen holds the title of "Chair Professor" at Xi'an Jiaotong University, Xi'an, China. Allen's main area of research concerns the philosophical foundations of cognitive science. He is particularly interested in the scientific study of cognition in nonhuman animals and computers, and he has published over 100 research articles on topics in the philosophy of mind, philosophy of biology, and artificial intelligence. His book Moral Machines: Teaching Robots Right from Wrong (Oxford University Press 2009) has been translated into numerous other languages. Since 1998 Allen has been consulting and programming for the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and is Associate Editor of the encyclopedia. He has received multiple national and international research grants for his work in computational humanities and the evolution of human cognition. In 2010 Allen received a Research Award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in Germany, which is given "in recognition of a researcher's entire achievements to date", and in 2013 he received the Barwise Prize from the American Philosophical Association "for significant and sustained contributions to areas relevant to philosophy and computing by an APA member".