CRITICAL THINKING PAPER 2 GUIDE

Reflection Paper on Metaphysics
(Phil 1301)
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Star Trek: The Next Generation

"The Measure of a Man" [1][1]

Most of us are aware that the television series *Star Trek* was about a starship, the *Enterprise*, whose mission was to explore the galaxy. This ship was part of a larger organization known as Starfleet. Serving as a Lt. Commander on board the ship was an android named Data. Data was an extremely advanced and unique android even by the standards of 24th century science. He had a special processor known as a "positronic brain" that allowed him to mimic human behavior in an extremely accurate manner. As a result, not only could he process information at lightning speed and arrive at rational conclusions, he also seemed to have desires, interests, and inclinations. He could formulate relationships and make free choices.

In this episode, Commander Bruce Maddox, a member of the scientific research division of Starfleet, arrives on board the *Enterprise* with orders for Data to be transferred to him for the purpose of being disassembled with the goal of learning more about "it" (Maddox refers to Data as "it", not "him", throughout the entire episode). His ultimate goal is to create an army of androids like Data which can serve the needs of Starfleet in space exploration. When Data learns that Maddox may not be able to reassemble him, he refuses to submit to the orders and is supported by Captain Picard, captain of the *Enterprise* and Data's commanding officer. Picard argues that, as an officer on the *Enterprise*, Data has rights—among them the right to refuse to undergo an experimental procedure such as this. However, Picard is unsuccessful in getting the transfer orders rescinded and so Data resigns from Starfleet.

Maddox takes legal action with the local JAG (Judge Advocate General) officer challenging Data's resignation and arguing that Data is not a person with a right to resign, but, being a machine, "it" is the property of Starfleet. He argues "Would you permit the computer of the *Enterprise* to refuse a refit?" going on to claim that Picard's reaction is, "emotional and irrational. You are endowing Data with human characteristics because it looks human, but it is not. If it were a box on wheels I would not be facing this opposition."

The JAG officer concurs with Maddox and rules that Data is the property of Starfleet and cannot resign or refuse to co-operate. Picard requests a hearing to challenge the ruling and

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[1][1] *Star Trek The Next Generation,* "The Measure of a Man," episode 35, written by Melinda Snodgrass and directed by Robert

is placed in the position of being the defending attorney for Data while his senior officer, Commander Riker, is given the unenviable job of prosecuting attorney.

Riker opens his case by having Data define android which Data defines as "an automaton made to resemble a human being." Riker emphasizes "automaton" and "resembles." After demonstrating Data's abilities as a machine, Riker summarizes his argument:

> The commander is a physical representation of a dream; an idea conceived of by the mind of a man. Its purpose – to serve human needs and interests. It's a collection of neural nets and heuristic algorithms. It's response dictated by elaborate software written by a man. It's hardware built by a man. And now a man will shut it off.

With that Riker reaches behind Data and turns the switch that shuts him down say "Pinocchio is broken. His strings have been cut."

During a recess in the proceedings, Picard consults with Guinan, a wise alien on board the *Enterprise* and becomes convinced that the real issue in this case is the creation of a race of Data's to be enslaved to do man's bidding. He believes this issue has been obscured "behind a comfortable, easy euphemism – property" and is determined to challenge that thinking.

In his opening defense Picard acknowledges that Data is a machine but comments that this is irrelevant, "We too are machines, just machines of a different type." He also acknowledges that, as Data was created by a human, so are we, "Children are created from the building blocks of their parents DNA. Are they property?" He then asks Data a series of questions demonstrating that, like any person, he has wants and desires, values things, and forms deep personal relationships.

Picard then calls Maddox to the stand and asks for the definition of a sentient being. Maddox offers three criteria: "Intelligence, self-awareness and consciousness." Picard goes on to ask Maddox to "prove to the court that I am sentient." When Maddox claims that Picard's sentience is obvious, Picard asks what the difference between himself and Data is. Maddox replies that Picard is self-aware (he acknowledges the first criteria of Data's intelligence) and defines self-aware as "Conscious of your existence and actions. You are aware of yourself and your own ego."

Picard turns to Data and asks him what he is currently doing. Data replies, "I am taking part in a legal hearing to determine my rights and status: am I a person or property." When asked what is at stake, he replies, "My right to choose. Perhaps my very life." Picard points out how often Data refers to himself in his reply, "*My* rights, *my* status, *my* right to choose, *my* life. He seems reasonably self-aware to me." He then asks Maddox, "What if Data can fulfill the last criteria, consciousness, in even the smallest degree? What is he then? Do you know?" He asks the same question of Riker and the JAG officer and goes on to say, "Starfleet was founded to seek out new life, well there it sits." Picard argues that if we create an army of Datas to do man's bidding, then "Thousands of Datas become a race. Won't we be judged by how we treat that race?"

After considering the arguments, the JAG officer makes her final ruling:

> It sits there looking at me and I don't know what it is. This case has dealt with metaphysics - with questions best left to saints and philosophers. I am neither competent nor qualified to answer those. But I've got to make a ruling to speak to the future. Is Data a machine? Yes. Is he the property of Starfleet? No. We have been dancing around the basic issue: Does Data have a soul? I don't know that he has. I don't know that I have. But I have got to give him the freedom to explore that question himself. It is the ruling of this court that Lt. Commander Data has the right to choose.

Data exercises his right to refuse to undergo the procedure encouraging Maddox to continue his research. Maddox agrees to rescind his request for transfer, commenting about Data that "*He's* remarkable."

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WHAT TO DO:

1. Read the article above based on the movie, Star Trek: The Next Generation "The Measure of a Man". You may watch the trailer of this movie, link at youtube video (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8whNAwuTY90)
2. Discuss in this paper the following (1 paragraph for each):
   a. (Par 1)What is the story about, what is the main issue discussed in the movie thriller? Describe the metaphysical problem involved in the story?
   b. (Par 2) Who is really "Data"—what do you think is the identity of this "being" in the world (if this is truly real)? Why? Can I used "he" or "it" to describe such being? Is he human? Is it a machine? What makes him unique machine? Characterize Data being a machine has human being's qualities. What are these qualities? Reproducing many of this machines can be called a "race"? Is this correct?
   c. (Par 3) Data refused to undergo procedures to be examined, to be dismantled, and be reproduced? Is he/it free? What does it mean for him to be free? Discuss the issues for granting Data his right to refuse, or shall anyone force him to undergo the procedures? Why?
   d. (Par 4) Is this movie metaphysical? Is this a fundamental problem of philosophy? A metaphysical problem? What can you conclude as important for us humans to learn from the movie? At the end, JAG officer made a ruling. Is the ruling right granting Data his right to refuse? Comment on this?
3. Limit to maximum of 2 pages, double spaced, standard font. Highest: 10; no paper is 0.
4. Due date: