

PHILOSOPHY 290 A01 (CRN 22411)

Philosophy and Science Fiction
Spring Semester, 2017

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Office Hours: Monday 1300- 1400 hrs, Thursday 1000 - 1100 hrs. and by appointment.

It is not a course in literature but in philosophy, using science fiction as a tool. To this end, emphasis will be placed on philosophical understanding, and selections from the science fiction literature are paired with selections from philosophical writings. Topics considered will include the concept of a person, the nature of punishment, the relationship between perception and reality, as well as topics in religion and the philosophy of language.

Formal Course Requirements and Grading Procedures

There will be two non-cumulative examinations (a mid-term and a final), each worth 25% of the course mark. Each examination will be one hour in length. Additionally, there will be two short papers (five page maximum, double-spaced, Times-Roman font, standard format) each worth 25% of the course grade, topics to be arranged in consultation with the instructor. Students are encouraged to decide early on their paper topics. Students are expected to have read and become familiar with the assigned material prior to its presentation and discussion in class. The TENTATIVE OUTLINE OF LECTURES AND DISCUSSIONS below indicates approximate times in this regard.

Significant dates

Examination: Mid-term examination: MT #1 Feb. 2 and MT #2 March 2

Final examination: scheduled by the university

Papers: First paper is due February 9.

Second paper is due March 16.

Exceptions from course requirements, adjustments for taking examinations at set examination dates, due-time for the paper, etc. will only be made in accordance with UVic regulations as published in the Calendar. It is the responsibility of the student to acquaint themselves and significant others with this fact so that vacations, family reunions, weddings etc. can be planned accordingly. Mid-term examinations and papers will be returned as soon as they are graded. Final examinations are the property of the University and will not be returned. They are available for viewing at the Records Office at a time designated by the University.

Approximately one-half the material in the syllabus will be covered by No more precise a time-frame is possible since the amount of time spent on each topic depends on the interests of the students in the course and on the issues that arise.

Grading

Marks will be assigned on a letter basis and may be converted to a percentile grade as follows:

100 - 90 = A+, 90 - 85 = A, 85 - 80 = A-, 80 - 75 = B+, 75 - 70 = B,

70 - 65 = B-, 65 - 60 = C+, 60 - 55 = C, 55 - 50 = D, 50 - 0 = F. 2

Students are encouraged to discuss their examinations and papers with the instructor

TENTATIVE OUTLINE OF LECTURES AND DISCUSSIONS

I. Persons

Science Fiction

- I. Asimov, "Evidence" in I. Asimov, *I, Robot* (1950) pp. 147-169
- J. Blish, "Watershed," in R. Silverberg, ed. *Mutants* (NY: Thomas Nelson, 1974) pp. 173-182.
- Cordwainer Smith, "The Ballad of Lost C'Mell" in Ben Bova, ed. *Science Fiction Hall of Fame* vol. II (NY: Doubleday, 1973) pp. 342-361

Philosophy

- R. Descartes, *Meditations* Chap. 1-2
- I. Kant, "Transition from the Common Rational Knowledge of Morality to the Philosophical" from I. Kant, *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* transl. LW Beck (NY: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959) pp. 9-22.
- P.F. Strawson, "Persons" in P.F. Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1964)

Optional

- suggested movie for possible essay topic: *50 First Dates*
- John Campbell, "What do You Mean ... Human?"

II. Experimentation

Science Fiction

- D. Keyes, "Flowers for Algernon" in R. Silverberg, ed. *Science Fiction Hall of Fame* vol. I (NY: Doubleday, 1970) pp. 500-525.

Philosophy

- Tri-Council Policy Statement *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*; available at http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2-2014/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf.

III. Reality and Perception

Science Fiction

- JL Borges, "The Circular Ruins," in *Jorge Luis Borges: Collected Fiction* transl.. A. Hurley (NY: Penguin, 1998) pp. 96-100.
- IB Singer, "Yachid and Yechida" in J Merrill, ed. *The Year's Best S-F: 10th Annual Edition* (NY: Dell, 1965) pp. 368-373.
- CL Harness, "The New Reality," in D. Knight, ed. *The Shape of Things*, (Toronto: Popular Library, 1965) pp. 42-80
- H: Gold, "The Man With English," in R. Silverberg, ed. *Strange Gifts* (NY: Thomas

Nelson, 1975) pp. 96-105 (reversal of sensations)

Philosophy

- G. Berkeley, *On the Principles of Human Knowledge*
- Hilary Putnam, "Brains in a vat;" available at http://ieas.unideb.hu/admin/file_2908.pdf.
- I. Kant: "Introduction" from *The Critique of Pure Reason* transl. NK Smith (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929) pp. 41-62.

Optional Reading

- L. Niven, "The Theory and Practice of time Travel", in L. Niven, *All the Myriad Ways in Galaxy*, Oct. 1968.
- David Chalmers, "The Matrix as Metaphysics" available at David Chalmers: <http://consc.net/papers/matrix.pdf>

IV. Language

Science Fiction

- JL Borges, "Funes the Memorious"
- R. Bradbury, "Referent" in Bleiler and Dikty, eds., *Imagination Unlimited* (NY: Berkley, 1952) pp. 5-13.

Philosophy

- Locke, "Of General Terms" and "Of Particles" in J. Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Bk. III. chaps. 3 & 7
- L. Wittgenstein, Paragraph 1-47 in L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958) pp. 2-21.

V. Religion

Science Fiction

- L. del Rey, "For I am a Jealous People," in F. Pohl, ed. *Star Short Novels* (NY: Ballantine, 1954) pp. 65-109. (to be announced)
- Henry Kuttner, "By These Presents" from H. Kuttner, *Ahead of Time*, New York: Ballantine, 1953; pp. 24-38
- R. Sheckley, "Forever" in R. Sheckley, *Shards of Space* (Montreal: Bantam Books, 1962), pp. 126-135

Philosophy

- John Duns Scotus, "The Existence of God" in AB Wolter, *John Duns Scotus* (NY: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962) pp. 39-85 (to be announced)
- St. Thomas Aquinas, "Whether the Human Soul is Incorruptible," in *Summa Theologica* Question LXXV article 6 (to be announced)
- I. Kant, "Paralogism of Pure Reason" from I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* transl. NK Smith (NY: Macmillan, 1965) pp. 368-380.

VI. Ethics

Responsibility and punishment

Science Fiction

- H. Franke, "The Orchid Cage" from H. Franke, *The Orchid Cage* transl. by C. Priest; (New York: Daw, 1973) pp. 139-174.(to be announced)
- Cordwainer Smith, "A Planet Named Shaol," in *Galaxy Science Fiction*, Oct. 1961

Philosophy

- Immanuel Kant, "Transition from the Common Rational Knowledge of Morality to the Philosophical" from I. Kant, *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* transl. LW Beck (NY: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959) pp. 9-22. (alternate translation available free on-line at http://www.inp.uw.edu.pl/mdsie/Political_Thought/Kant%20-%20groundwork%20for%20the%20metaphysics%20of%20morals%20with%20essays.pdf)
- James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism;" available at <http://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/phil1100/Rachels1.pdf>

Deliberate Death:

Science Fiction

- A. Davidson, "The Certificate" in R.P Mills, ed. *A Decade of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (New York: Dell, 1959), pp. 76-80.

Philosophy

- Immanuel Kant, "Transition from the Common Rational Knowledge of Morality to the Philosophical" from I. Kant, *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* transl. LW Beck (NY: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959) pp. 9-22
- E-H W. Kluge, "EUTHANASIA and ASSISTED SUICIDE;" invited testimony presented to The Special Senate Committee on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide. 1994.

If time permits:

VII. Politics and Power

Science Fiction

1. U LeGuin, *The Dispossessed*
2. DE Westlake, *Anarchaos*
3. R. Sheckley, "The Girls and Nugent Miller," in R. Sheckley, *Shards of Space* (Montreal: Bantam, 1962) pp. 24-34

Philosophy

4. T Hobbs, *Leviathan*
5. M. Djilas, *The New Class*
6. Gatens, M., *Feminism and Philosophy: Perspectives on Difference and Equality* (Indiana University Press, 1991)