

Syllabus for *Philosophy 495B: Philosophy and Film – Science Fiction*

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Here is a brief outline of the topics which this syllabus covers:

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I. Why Take *Philosophy and Film*?

Everyone asks questions such as What can we know? What is the world? Who are we? Are we free? Engaging with science fiction films is among the best ways we can make progress with these and similar questions. Why? "Philosophy is its own time raised to the level of thought." So wrote Hegel, and he had a point. Our own time is visual. Where people in earlier times heard or read, we see. Furthermore, look to the future, where others are turned toward the past. It's natural, therefore, to find our philosophy in a visual medium such as film and a genre such as science fiction.

Of course there are other reasons you might take *Philosophy and Film*. Studying philosophy will help you to improve your reading, listening, thinking, writing, and speaking skills. The more you work on philosophy, the better you can expect to get. As a result, philosophy students often do exceptionally well on standard examinations for graduate and professional school admission such as the GRE, the GMAT, and the LSAT. Moreover, they tend to succeed in a wide variety of professions which require the skills mentioned above, including business, law, politics, teaching, and civil service. Traditionally, philosophy has been at the heart of any good education. Philosophy can also be an extremely pleasant way to spend one's time. But all of these reasons take a back seat to the importance of the questions raised above.

II. Teaching Goals and Learning Objectives

I have five main teaching goals in *Philosophy and Film*. These goals concern Basic Knowledge of Ethics, Fundamental Skills, Critical Thinking, Liberal Education, and Philosophy in Everyday Life. I explain the Learning Objectives involved with each goal below.

Goal 1: Basic Knowledge of Philosophy and Film

- ▲ Students meet this goal by knowing and being able to demonstrate their knowledge of the following:
 - Objective 1 – Questions: Fundamental questions which have animated the history of western philosophy, especially concerning epistemological skepticism, personal identity, the mind-body relation, free will, and the nature of time and space;
 - Objective 2 – Methods: Methods used to try to answer these questions;
 - Objective 3 – Answers: Significant answers offered to these questions;
 - Objective 4 – Importance: The importance of these questions, methods, and answers, as well as

- their relevance to their own lives and the lives of people in their community;
- Objective 5 – Evaluations: The most significant reasons for and against using these methods and accepting these answers.

Goal 2: Enhancement of Fundamental Skills

- △ Students meet this goal by being significantly better able to meet the following objectives:
 - Objective 1 – Reading: Read philosophical texts with more than minimal understanding;
 - Objective 2 – Listening: Listen attentively and with profit to lectures on philosophical material;
 - Objective 3 – Speaking & Writing: Speak and write about these texts correctly, clearly, and concisely;
 - Objective 4 – Group Interaction: Work in groups to enhance both their own understanding of philosophy and that of other group members.

Goal 3: Improved Critical Thinking

- △ Students meet teaching goal by being significantly better able to meet the following objectives:
 - Objective 1 – Problems: Recognize and formulate problems within difficult subject matter;
 - Objective 2 – Analysis: Break down problems and similar phenomena into manageable components;
 - Objective 3 – Synthesis: Draw the connections between related issues in order to solve larger problems;
 - Objective 4 – Particular to Universal: Reason inductively from particular claims to universal claims;
 - Objective 5 – Universal to Particular: Reason deductively from universal claims to particular claims;
 - Objective 6 – Bias: Recognize and avoid possible sources of bias and distortion in their reasoning.

Goal 4: Cultivation of Liberal Education

- △ Students meet this goal by being significantly better able to meet the following objectives:
 - Objective 1 – Integration: Integrate their understanding of philosophy into the larger contexts of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary learning;
 - Objective 2 – Perspective: Appreciate multiple points-of-view on a given idea or issue and diverse interpretations of a given text;
 - Objective 3 – History & Culture: Think with sensitivity to historical and cultural environments about matters of great importance;
 - Objective 4 – Beyond History & Culture: Recognize the way time and place influence thought as well as ideas and value that (may) transcend time and place.
 - Objective 5 – The Good Life: Engage with philosophical issues in a manner that is enjoyable and fulfilling and that enriches their lives as a whole.

Goal 5: Philosophy in Everyday Life

- △ Students meet this goal by being significantly better able to meet the following objectives:
 - Objective 1 – Identification: Identify philosophical issues as they arise outside of the classroom;
 - Objective 2 – Cognitive Engagement: Bring rigorous and lucid thinking to bear on these issues;
 - Objective 3 – Communication: Communicate this thinking with clarity and persuasive force;
 - Objective 4 – Community: Interact productively, respectfully, and enjoyably among peers on issues of great significance, even in the face of strong disagreement;
 - Objective 5 – Life-Long Learning: Develop the habit of seeking knowledge and wisdom over an entire life.

III. Course Texts

Our primary texts are

- △ *Science Fiction and Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence*, Susan Schneider (Editor), Wiley-Blackwell, 1st edition (May 26, 2009), ISBN-10: 1405149078, ISBN-13: 978-1405149075
- △ *Introducing Philosophy Through Film: Key Texts, Discussion, and Film Selections*, Richard Fumerton (Editor), Diane Jeske (Editor), Wiley-Blackwell; 1st edition (April 28, 2009), ISBN-10: 1405171014, ISBN-13: 978-1405171014

However, a few readings will be made available through the course website. All of them will be open-source and freely available (without any violation of copyright law). As preparation for writing the final paper in this course, I advise students to consult:

△ *Writing Philosophy: A Student's Guide to Writing Philosophy Essays*, Lewis Vaughn, Oxford. ISBN-10: 0195179560, ISBN-13: 978-0195179569.

However, students are not required to purchase this book.

IV. Schedule of Reading Assignments

What follows is the schedule of readings and viewings for the course:

- Introduction to the Class
 - T1
 - Reading:
 - Clark, *A Brain Speaks* (a.k.a. *I Am John's Brain*) in Schneider
 - Film:
 - *They Are Made of Meat*
- Knowledge and Skepticism
 - T3
 - Readings:
 - Pollock, *Brain in a Vat* in Schneider
 - Chalmers, *The Matrix as Metaphysics* in Schneider
 - Film:
 - *The Matrix*
 - T6
 - Readings:
 - Nozick, *The Experience Machine* in Fumerton
 - Bostrom, *Are You in a Computer Simulation?* in Schneider
 - Film:
 - *Total Recall* (Original Version)
- Identity, Artificial Intelligence, and Super Intelligence
 - T8
 - Reading:
 - Perry, *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* in Fumerton
 - Film:
 - *Metropolis* (2010 Restored Original Version)
 - T10
 - Reading:
 - Dennett, *Where Am I?* in Schneider
 - Film:
 - *Alien* (2004 Director's Cut Version)
 - T13
 - Readings:
 - Dennet, *Consciousness in Human and Robot Minds* in Schneider
 - Film:
 - *Blade Runner* (1992 Director's Cut Version)
 - T15
 - Reading:
 - Searle, *Minds, Brains, and Programs* in Fumerton
 - Film:
 - *2001: A Space Odyssey*
 - T16
 - Reading:

- Clark, *Cyborgs Unplugged* in Schneider
 - Film:
 - *Terminator 1*
 - T19
 - Reading:
 - Kurzweil, *Super Intelligence and Singularity* in Schneider
 - Film:
 - *Terminator 2*
- Destiny, Fate, and Free Will
 - T21
 - Reading:
 - Schick, *Choice, Purpose, and Understanding* to be Distributed
 - Film:
 - *The Matrix Reloaded*
 - T23
 - Reading:
 - Žižek, *Reloaded Revolutions* to be Distributed
 - Film:
 - *The Matrix Revolutions*
 - T26
 - Reading:
 - Lucas, *Free Will* in Fumerton
 - Film:
 - *Pi: Faith in Chaos*
 - T28
 - Reading:
 - Huemmer, *Free Will and Determinism in the World of "The Minority Report"* in Schneider
 - Film:
 - *Minority Report*
- Time and Space
 - T31
 - Reading:
 - Sider, *Time* in Schneider
 - Taylor, *Space and Time* in Fumerton
 - Film:
 - *12 Monkeys*
 - T33
 - Reading:
 - Chisholm and Taylor, *Making Things to Have Happened* in Fumerton
 - Film:
 - *Back to the Future*
 - T36
 - Reading:
 - Lewis, *The Paradoxes of Time Travel* in Fumerton
 - Film:
 - *Donnie Darko* (2005 Director's Cut Version)
 - T38
 - Reading:
 - Deutsch and Lockwood, *The Quantum Physics of Time Travel* in Schneider
 - Film:
 - *A Brief History of Time*

I find all of these works a source of delight and insight, and I share my enthusiasm with my students.

V. Course Grading

Your grade in this course is a representation of how well you have achieved the learning objectives in Section II. One of my goals is to make the grading process as transparent as possible to my students. Grading in this class is based on the following:

1. In-class participation (200 points),
2. Weekly Responses (300 points),
3. Final paper (500 points)

I say a bit below about each. Please note that **all of these assignments have individual grading rubrics** which, for obvious reasons, are not included with this syllabus. Please also note that there is **no extra credit** in this course.

1. In-Class Participation: In-class participation is worth up to 200 of the 1,000 possible points in this course. When grading in-class participation, I pay especially close attention to the following questions:

- ⤴ Does this student speak frequently in class, while leaving room for others to talk?
- ⤴ Does this student listen attentively and sympathetically to others in the class?
- ⤴ Does this student show intellectual curiosity about the subject matter?
- ⤴ Does this student help the rest of the class (including the instructor!) understand the readings and their implications?
- ⤴ Does this student treat others in a manner that is respectful and displays an awareness of etiquette?
- ⤴ Does this student attend class regularly and/or provide good reason for having missed any classes?
- ⤴ Does this student come prepared for class, having read the day's assignment and brought all relevant material (especially the course text!) with her?
- ⤴ Does this student pay attention during the class (or does she text, send emails, surf the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, etc. during class)?

Note that the point of grading students on participation is *not* to encourage them to compete with one another. Rather, it is to provide you with extra incentive to engage in a cooperative educational experience and to develop a sense of a community of learners that you might otherwise lack – and which you can take with you to other classes. Importantly, I give all students feedback about (and 50% of the possible points for) their in-class performance at midterm in order to allow them to make modifications to their behavior should they wish to do so.

2. Weekly Responses: Weekly responses are worth up to 300 of the 1,000 available points in this course.

- Weekly response are based on the reading and film viewing for each given week. They must be addressed to the prompt provided by the instructor.
- Weekly responses must be between 300-500 words.
- Weekly responses must be submitted to the course blog no less than 24 hours prior to the beginning of the first T-day of the week.
 - For the address of the course blog, see the first page of this syllabus.
 - For the schedule of T-days, see list above.
- Each weekly response will receive a grade of 'S' for satisfactory provided that it is complete and 'U' for unsatisfactory otherwise. Each 'S' is worth 20 points.
- You must, as always, do your own work. Plagiarism will be dealt with harshly.

3. Formal Writings: The final paper is worth up to 500 of the 1,000 possible points in this course.

- Students must turn in a paper proposal and outline via email by T31. Students who turn in their thesis statements on time receive full credit (25) and prompt feedback. Students can turn in the thesis late, though the credit which they receive declines daily (20% if it is up to 1 day late, 15% if it is between 1 and 2 days late, etc.). I provide further information on the thesis statement as well several weeks before they are collected.
- The paper itself is worth up to the remaining 475 points and is due on May 10, COB.
- The paper should be 10-15 pages (3,000-4,000 words).

- More detailed information will be forthcoming.

Grading in General: Grades for assignments and for the course as a whole will reflect these standards:

- △ A = Excellent performance (100-90%)
- △ B = Good performance (89-80%)
- △ C = Adequate performance (79-70%)
- △ D = Less than adequate performance, though not so far below as to require failure (60-69%)
- △ F = Wholly inadequate performance (less than 60%)

I do not offer the option of an incomplete grade in this class.

VI. Some Suggestions about Succeeding in This Class

Philosophy is not an easy subject. However, there are a number of ways that you can make success in this class more likely. One of these is to adopt what we might call “good student practices.” These include the following

- Spend at least 2-3 hours preparing for each 1 hour of class time.
- Attend class regularly,
- Keep up with the assigned readings,
- Do the reading several times and take careful notes while you do,
- Make sure that you are ready to answer all of the questions on the reading guides (provided on the course web site in the folder named “Reading Guides”)
- Be an active participant in class,
- Ask about what you don't understand,
- Visit me during my office hours and continue the class conversation,
- Form a study group,
- Start writing your paper early,
- Take advantage of the university's Student Writing Center.

These practices will help you succeed in any class, and they will certainly improve your educational experience in this one. In addition to good student practices, I also encourage you to adopt what I'll call “good philosophical practices.” These practices involve asking and attempting to answer all of the following questions about the reading material:

- What problem is the author trying to solve?
- What is the author's reasons for favoring his/her solution and for rejecting other possible solutions?
- What are the most important assumptions that the author is making?
- What criticisms might one make of the author's solution and her reasoning for it?
- Does the author offer valid arguments for her positions? Does he/she offer sound arguments?
- How might some of the other authors we have read criticize this author's reasoning?
- What sort of audience is the author presupposing?

I am happy to help to the extent possible with any of these practices.

VII. Course Policies

1. Prerequisites: There are no formal prerequisites for this class. However, students are expected to be able to read, think, and write at the college level, to have good study skills, to be contentious learners, to be bring an open-minded attitude to class.
2. Enrollment: The maximum enrollment for each section of the class is 20 students. If you wish to add the course, it is your responsibility to make sure that you are enrolled. Please check with the Registrar's office if you have any questions about the details of your enrollment. If you wish to withdraw from this course, it is your responsibility to submit the relevant paperwork within the time limits set by the Office of the Registrar.
3. Students with Special Needs: I take every reasonable measure to insure that no one is denied access to this class, and that no one is disadvantaged within the class, because of a disability. Of course, the

needs of students vary considerably. As a result, I handle these matters on an *ad hoc* basis. If you are a student in this class with special needs, please contact me as soon as possible, and we will make whatever arrangements are necessary.

4. ESL Students: Some of my very best students in this class have been ESL (English as a Second Language) students. However, there is no question that philosophy raises special challenges for students who are not native speakers of English.
5. In-Class Conduct, Part 1: Please arrive on time for class. If you are late, please take your seat with as little fuss as possible. Please do not disrupt the class in anyway, e.g., be talking during lecture or speaking out of turn during discussion. One and only one person should be talking at any given time. You may drink (non-alcoholic) beverages in class, but please do not eat anything no matter how quiet you think you can be while doing so. Please turn off and store your cell phones before class begins and keep them there until the class is over. Please do not use your computer, tablet, etc., for any purposes other than those immediately related to the course. Do not spend class time on Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, etc.
6. In-Class Conduct, Part 2: All viewpoints which express respect for others are welcome, appreciated, and deserving of consideration. No one's ideas are to be dismissed out of hand because they strike others as being foreign, strange, or just "weird." In general there are two basic rules of decency to which all of us are expected to conform in this class:
 1. The first of these basic rules is that no one will personally attack anyone else in (or out) of the class. Ideas are fair game, as are reasons for holding these ideas, provided that these criticism are undertaken conscientiously and as part of a search for truth. But, to repeat, personal attacks are strictly off limits.
 2. The second is that reason is the ultimate arbiter in class. While we might reject a position as false or an argument as invalid, we will not reject anything on the basis of its being subject to ridicule or scorn, hatred or contempt.I strongly encourage openness to a wide variety of beliefs and a willingness to challenge these beliefs within a context of respect for all. I stress to my students that You do not need to accept or reject any position in order to thrive in my classroom. Ultimately, your minds are your own to make up.
7. Late Work, Missed Exams, Etc: I do not accept late work or schedule makeup exams accept under the most extreme emergencies. Not included under these emergencies are the following: work, other classes, friends with problems, family members with problems (excepting the most serious of these), broken computers, broken printers, lack on Internet connectivity, and failure to read the syllabus.
8. A Note on Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty: Plagiarism and academic dishonesty are offenses committed against everyone in this class, as well as against the spirit of the university – in general. I fully support this institutions policies regarding plagiarism and academic dishonesty. I encourage you to review these policies here: <>. Violations of these policies will result, at a minimum, of a failing grade in this class. I am happy to clarify these polices in any way. Please ask if you are in doubt.

Finally, I reserve the right to make unilateral changes to this syllabus should they be necessary for the success of this class. I will notify students of any changes made to the course syllabus and will make a revised copy available to them. I am happy to answer questions about this class.