

PHIL 2750: Philosophy & Science Fiction

Fall, 2007

Spacetime coordinates: Hlms 196, T 2⁰⁰-3¹⁵, R 2⁰⁰-4⁴⁵
Professor: Michael Huemer
Email: 6rfac0y02@sneakemail.com

Web page: home.sprynet.com/~owl1
Office: 266 Hellems
Office Hours: Tue 3:30-4:30

What Is This Course About?

We will discuss philosophical issues appearing in science fiction literature and movies, including the likes of Asimov, Card, and *Star Trek*. Issues discussed will include: time travel, personal identity, artificial intelligence, philosophical skepticism, the problem of evil, free will, and anarchism.

Readings & Movies

There are two required books at the CU Book Store: *Foundation* by Isaac Asimov, and *The Worthing Saga* by Orson Scott Card.

All other readings are on e-reserve at the library. To access these, go to <http://libraries.colorado.edu/search/p?SEARCH=huemer> on the web. You will need your *identikey* and *password*. You may want to print everything in advance. If you don't understand how this works, see the FAQ at <http://ucblibraries.colorado.edu/circulation/ereserves/faqstudents.htm>.

We will watch a movie in class each Thursday.

Course Requirements & Grading

Term Paper (45% of grade):

You will have to write a term paper. Due dates are on the schedule below. See attached "Paper Assignment."

Reading Quizzes (40%):

For each assigned reading, you will be asked to answer a few short-answer questions at the beginning of the class during which the reading will be discussed (see dates on schedule below). You'll have about 5 minutes to do the quiz. *Note:* If you walk in after I've collected the quizzes, you won't be allowed to take it, and so you'll get *no credit* for that quiz. ☹

Missing quizzes: You can miss three quizzes during the semester without affecting your grade. If you have to miss more than that, you'll have to come up with documentation of your serious medical condition that prevents you from attending class.

Participation (15%):

This includes attendance as well as participating in class by discussion and raising questions.

Proper Attitude about Grades:

(a) You should be here primarily to learn, not to get a grade. (b) Expect to be graded on your observable intellectual performance, not on the basis of effort or need. (c) Relax. After you graduate, no one will ever look at your grades again. The grade is mainly for *you*, to let you know how much understanding you displayed.

Who Should Take This Class?

1. If you like science fiction and you like philosophy, you will probably like this class. Those who like *arguing* about *theoretical questions* will probably enjoy the class. Those who don't, won't.
2. Please don't take the class unless you are able to regularly make it on time.



3. If you love political correctness (be honest!), if you think a teacher's job is to stoke students' self-esteem, or if you think there's no truth and all beliefs are equal, then you probably shouldn't take a class from me.
4. The benefit of the class is that you will learn about some fundamental philosophical issues and theories that appear in many stories and movies. Even better, you will be familiarized, a little bit, with how to think and argue logically about these issues. Most importantly, we'll watch a lot of movies.

Other Guidelines



1. To contact me: send email to the address listed above, and I will probably respond the same day. Or call between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m.; leave a message, since I screen my calls.
2. Feel free come to my office to talk about philosophy, play chess, or whatever. If you have any questions, I will do my best to answer them, but you needn't have a specific question to come.
3. During class, please do not hesitate to comment on or ask about anything we discuss. Feel free to say whatever is on your mind (that has to do with philosophy).
4. I have a web page (<home.sprynet.com/~owl1> or <home.earthlink.net/~owl232>), which includes some information about the class, including this syllabus & some lecture notes, among other, more interesting things. You may wish to view the philosophy humor.

Schedule

This shows when you should have completed each reading assignment. *Note:* Some days have more than one reading assignment. Also note due dates.

Unit 1 Introduction, Epistemology	
T, Aug. 28	Introduction, Course Requirements.
R, Aug. 30	Skepticism. Pollock, “Skeptical Problems” Movie: <i>Vanilla Sky</i>
T, Sept. 4	Skepticism. Bostrom, “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?”
R, Sept. 6	Skepticism. Chalmers, “The Matrix as Metaphysics,” pp. 1-10, 13-18 Movie: <i>TNG</i> , “The Inner Light”
T, Sept. 11	Skepticism. Huemer, “Direct Realism and the Brain-in-a-Vat Argument”
R, Sept. 13	Problem of Other Minds. Heinlein, “They—” Movie: <i>Battlestar Galactica</i> , “Crossroads”
Unit 2 General Metaphysics	
T, Sept. 18	Time Travel. Heinlein, “—All You Zombies—”
R, Sept. 20	Time Travel. Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” Movie: <i>Timeline</i> Due: Topic Description
T, Sept. 25	Possible Worlds. Lewis, “Possible Worlds”
R, Sept. 27	Quantum Mechanics: Many worlds. Gardner, “Multiverses and Blackberries” Movie: <i>TOS</i> , “Mirror, Mirror”
T, Oct. 2	Quantum Mechanics. Albert, “Bohm’s Alternative to Quantum Mechanics”
R, Oct. 4	Quantum Mechanics, cont’d. Movie: <i>TNG</i> , “Parallels”
T, Oct. 9	Doomsday. Bostrom, “A Primer on the Doomsday Argument”
Unit 3 Metaphysics of Persons	
R, Oct. 11	Artificial Intelligence. Searle, “Minds, Brains, and Programs” Movie: <i>Ghost in the Shell</i>
T, Oct. 16	Artificial Intelligence. Fodor’s reply to Searle; Searle’s reply to Fodor
R, Oct. 18	Nature of Persons. Dennett, “Where Am I?” Movie: <i>DS9</i> , “Life Support” Due: First draft
T, Oct. 23	Personal Identity. Parfit, “What We Believe Ourselves to Be”



R, Oct. 25	Personal Identity, cont'd. Movie: <i>Voyager</i> , "Ashes to Ashes"	
T, Oct. 30	Free Will. Huemer, "Free Will in Science Fiction"	
R, Nov. 1	Free Will. Goldman, "Actions, Predictions, and Books of Life" Movie: <i>Minority Report</i>	
T, Nov. 6	Free Will. Stace, "The Problem of Morals"	
R, Nov. 8	Free Will. Lucas, "Minds, Machines, and Gödel" Movie: <i>DS9</i> , "The Abandoned"	
Unit 4 Ethics		
T, Nov. 13	Mortality. Nagel, "Death"	
R, Nov. 15	Mortality. Bostrom, "The Fable of the Dragon-Tyrant" Movie: <i>Voyager</i> , "Death Wish" Due: Second draft.	
T, Nov. 20	No class—Thanksgiving break	Note: This would be a good time to start the selections from Card's <i>The Worthing Saga</i> (104 pages!).
R, Nov. 22	No class—Thanksgiving break	
T, Nov. 27	Hedonism. Nozick, "The Experience Machine"; start <i>The Worthing Saga</i>	
R, Nov. 29	Problem of Evil. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" Movie: <i>TNG</i> , "Hide and Q"	
T, Dec. 4	Problem of Evil, cont'd. Card, <i>The Worthing Saga</i> , pp. 3-31, 114-19, 154-211, 257-71	
Unit 5 Political & Social Philosophy		
R, Dec. 6	Politics & Society: central planning. Asimov, <i>Foundation</i> , pp. 3-46 Movie: tba. <i>More Galactica?</i>	
T, Dec. 11	Anarchy. Stephenson, <i>The Diamond Age</i> , 1-37	
R, Dec. 13	Anarchy. Friedman, <i>The Machinery of Freedom</i> , ch. 28-30 Movie: tba. <i>More Galactica?</i>	
Sat, Dec 15, 7:30 a.m.	Due: Final paper. (scheduled final exam time)	

Paper Assignment

1. *Topic:* Select a science fiction story. (May be a movie, TV show, book, or short story. See next page for suggestions.) By the end of the semester, you'll write a paper that does all of the following:
 - a) Briefly summarize the story, with special attention to philosophically important developments.
 - b) Explain what philosophical issue the story raises. This must be a *general* issue that applies beyond the scope of the particular story (e.g., free will, personal identity, etc.).
 - c) Discuss the main positions people may take about that issue.
 - d) Discuss what view (if any) on the issue you think the author of the story is putting forward. Use details from the story to support that.
 - e) Explain what *you* think about that issue. *Important:* You must include an actual argument for your view.
2. *Length:* Final paper should be *at least* 2000 words (which is about 8 pages), possibly more. Drafts may be shorter.
3. *Sub-assignments:* You must turn in all of these:
 - a) *Topic description:* This will be a single page in which you summarize what you'd like to write about. If it doesn't sound good to me, I'll tell you to pick another topic, and you'll have to turn in another page.
 - b) *First draft:* This is what it sounds like. I will write comments on it and give it back to you.
 - c) *Second draft:* You'll change the paper to take account of my comments on the first draft. In some cases, you may have to completely rewrite. I will write more comments on the second draft.
 - d) *Final paper:* You'll take account of my comments on the second draft, to prepare the final paper.
4. *Due dates:* See Schedule. Late assignments will be penalized. Notice that the final paper is due at 7:30 a.m., so you may want to send it the night before.
5. *Getting me the paper:* You must give me an *electronic* copy of all drafts & the final paper. Send it to 6rfac0y02@sneakemail.com, or give me a disk (PC only). Acceptable file formats: MS-Word for Windows, WordPerfect, rtf, txt, or pasted into regular email message. If you send me another format and I can't read it, it'll be counted as late.
6. *Grading:* I don't like reading grammatical, spelling, punctuation, word usage, and typographical errors. Therefore, you'll be graded down for these (even on drafts). You'll also be evaluated for clarity of exposition, interestingness, and logicalness.
7. *General paper-writing guidelines:* See the Writing Guide on my web site. The guide identifies many errors that students get downgraded for.
8. *Acceptable stories to write about:* You may use any story on the list below (which includes everything discussed in this class, plus more). Stories not on this list must be approved by me (I won't let you use one that I have not seen or read).

Note: Just because you *like* an SF story does not mean that it is suitable for this assignment! Stories must be chosen for their *philosophical content*; if it doesn't address a major philosophical issue, it isn't suitable.

(cont'd next page ➡)

Some Good Philosophical Science Fiction*

Movies

<i>12 Monkeys</i>	<i>Star Trek: First Contact</i>
<i>AI</i>	<i>Star Wars</i> (any of them)
<i>Blade Runner</i>	<i>The Time Machine</i> (2002)
<i>Brave New World</i> (1998)	<i>The Butterfly Effect</i>
<i>Earthsea</i> (2004)	<i>The Final Cut</i> (2004)
<i>Firefly</i> movie	<i>The Matrix</i>
<i>Gattaca</i>	<i>Timeline</i> (2003)
<i>Ghost in the Shell</i> (Kokaku Kidotai)	<i>Vanilla Sky</i>
<i>Minority Report</i>	

TV episodes

<i>TOS</i> 039 (2.4): “Mirror, Mirror”	<i>DS9</i> 443 (2.23): “Crossover”
<i>TOS</i> 053 (2.24): “The Ultimate Computer”	<i>DS9</i> 452 (3.6): “The Abandoned”
<i>TNG</i> 111 (1.9): “Hide and Q”	<i>DS9</i> 459 (3.13): “Life Support”
<i>TNG</i> 135 (2.9): “The Measure of a Man”	<i>DS9</i> 466 (3.19): “Through the Looking Glass”
<i>TNG</i> 163 (3.15): “Yesterday’s Enterprise”	<i>DS9</i> 492 (4.19): “Shattered Mirror”
<i>TNG</i> 216 (5.16): “Ethics”	<i>DS9</i> 573 (7.23): “Extreme Measures”
<i>TNG</i> 223 (5.23): “I, Borg”	<i>Voy</i> 130 (2.18): “Death Wish”
<i>TNG</i> 225 (5.25): “The Inner Light”	<i>Voy</i> 238 (6.18): “Ashes to Ashes”
<i>TNG</i> 235 (6.9): “The Quality of Life”	<i>Ent</i> 013 (1.12): “Dear Doctor”
<i>TNG</i> 241 (6.15) “Tapestry”	<i>Battlestar Gallactica</i> , new series. Especially interesting: “Crossroads”, “Dirty Hands”, “Resurrection Ship”, “Final Cut”, “Fragged”
<i>TNG</i> 247 (6.21): “Frame of Mind”	<i>Firefly</i> series
<i>TNG</i> 250 (6.24): “Second Chances”	
<i>TNG</i> 263 (7.11): “Parallels”	

Literature:

Asimov: <i>I, Robot</i>	Heinlein: “They”
<i>Foundation</i>	“All You Zombies”
<i>Nightfall</i>	Stephenson: <i>Snow Crash</i>
O.S. Card: <i>Ender’s Game</i>	<i>The Diamond Age</i>
<i>Children of the Mind</i>	E.M. Forster: “The Machine Stops”
<i>Speaker for the Dead</i>	LeGuin: <i>A Wizard of Earthsea</i>
<i>The Worthing Saga</i>	<i>The Farthest Shore</i>
<i>Pastwatch</i>	<i>The Dispossessed</i>
Vonnegut: “Harrison Bergeron”	

* Abbreviations: *DS9* = *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. *TNG* = *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. *TOS* = *Star Trek* (the original series). *Voy* = *Star Trek: Voyager*. *Ent* = *Star Trek: Enterprise*. All *Star Trek* episodes include the production number, followed by season and episode number.

List of Readings for e-reserve

Class: Phil 2750-880, Fall 2007

Prof.: Michael Huemer

Campus Box 232, 303-417-9803, owl232@earthlink.net

On disc in PDF format:

Nick Bostrom, "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?"

Nick Bostrom, "The Fable of the Dragon-Tyrant"

Nick Bostrom, "A Primer on the Doomsday Argument"

David Chalmers, "The Matrix as Metaphysics"

Martin Gardner, "Multiverses and Blackberries"

Michael Huemer, "Free Will in Science Fiction"

Provided as hard copies:

John Pollock, "Skeptical Problems"

Michael Huemer, "Direct Realism and the Brain-in-a-Vat Argument"

Robert Heinlein, "They—"

Robert Heinlein, "—All You Zombies—"

David Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel"

David Lewis, "Possible Worlds"

David Albert, "Bohm's Alternative to Quantum Mechanics"

John Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs" (incl. Fodor's response + Searle's response to Fodor)

Daniel Dennett, "Where Am I?"

Derek Parfit, "What We Believe Ourselves to Be"

Alvin Goldman, "Actions, Predictions, and Books of Life"

W. T. Stace, "The Problem of Morals"

J. R. Lucas, "Minds, Machines, and Gödel"

Thomas Nagel, "Death"

Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine"

John L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"

Neil Stephenson, *The Diamond Age*, 1-37

David Friedman, *The Machinery of Freedom*, ch. 28-30