

Phil 130  
Philosophy and Pop Culture: Science Fiction  
Fall 2014  
University of Oregon

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**Introduction:**

Rarely is science fiction taken as seriously as it should be. Philosophers Hannah Arendt and Hans Jonas have both asked us to do so. Their argument is simple: we often do not think enough about the potential effects of new technologies, but science fiction does. These effects often radically restructure how we think and how we live, but too often we don't recognize these changes until long after they have occurred.

In this class we will examine how science fiction can help us to think about what we are doing and where we are headed. We will do so by thematically examining some classic works of science fiction and approaching them through a variety of philosophical lenses. We will discover how they illuminate and are illuminated by philosophy.

**Course Objectives:**

1. To examine a variety of science fiction themes through classic sci fi works
2. To historically examine the rise of science and the effects of technology
3. To introduce major movements of philosophy like postmodernity, feminism, positivism, etc.

**Expectations:**

Over the short term students will read five short books and a variety of short excerpts from philosophy texts. The books are:

Foundation by Isaac Asimov  
Ender's Game by Orson Scott Card  
Rendezvous with Rama by Arthur C. Clark  
The Emperor's Soul by Brandon Sanderson  
The Windup Girl by Paulo Bacigalupi

We will also read at least the following short stories:

Blood Music by Greg Bear  
Dinner in Audoghost by Bruce Sterling  
Looking Through Lace by Ruth Nestvold  
The Undiscovered by William Sanders  
The Immortal by Jorge Luis Borges  
Lottery in Babylon by Jorge Luis Borges

Students will turn in a 1 page, double spaced paper for each book we read. These assignments are meant both to give the student an opportunity to show they have done the reading and to improve their writing. If all 5 are done with a passing grade, the student will get 10 free points.

The class is primarily based on lecture and class discussion and will have a midterm and final based on the lectures.

Students will also be expected to give a presentation on a science fiction work (literature or film) of their choice. Students are welcome to present on works they have enjoyed and would like to share with the rest of the class or select a suggested work. Selected works include: Moon, District 9, Metropolis, The Matrix, Wall-E, Blade Runner, Brazil, Frankenstein, The Last Man, The Parable of the Sower, Ready Player One, etc.

**Grade Breakdown:**

60 pts	5 papers + 10 free pts for doing all 5 assignments with at least a 5
40 pts	presentation
60 pts	midterm
100 pts	final exam
40 pts	attendance and participation

Total 300 pts

**Schedule:**

<b>Lessons:</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
Week 1: Intro 9.30: Intro syllabus, why sci fi?	begin reading Foundation Arendt & Jonas on sci fi
10.2: Premodernity	Bauman, Intro Modernity and Ambiguity
Week 2: Project of Modernity 10.7: Modernity: Philosophical Foundations 10.9: Enlightenment vs Romanticism	Descartes, sf Discourse on Method Kant, What is Enlightenment?
Week 3: Science and Capitalism 10.14: Science and Positivism	Husserl, sf Crisis Gadamer, sf Truth and Method *Foundation due
10.16: Modernity: Capitalism, Marx	Marx, various selections
Week 4: Modernity 10.21: Modernity: Democracy 10.23: Modernity: Bureaucracy, Death of God	De Toqueville, sf Democracy in America Nietzsche, sf The Gay Science
Week 5: Games and Thinking Colonialism 10.28: Arendt: Thinking vs Cognition	De Las Casas, sf Destruction of Indies sf Thinking, Eichmann *Ender's Game Due

10.30: Midterm

Week 6: The Other

11.4: Colonialism & Postcolonialism

The Undiscovered by William Sanders  
De Las Casas, sf Destruction of Indies  
Levinas, sf Totality and Infinity

11.6: The Other

Week 7: Others

11.11: Feminism

Looking Through Lace by Ruth Nestvold  
\*Rendevouz with Rama due  
Vine Deloria Jr, sf Power and Place

11.13: Non-human Others

Week 8: Postmodernity

11.18: Postmodernity

11.20: Solid Modernity

Baudrillard, sf Simulation and Simulacra  
Foucault, sf Discipline and Punish  
\*The Emperor's Soul due

Week 9: Postmodernity

11.25: Liquid Modernity

Bauman, sf Can Ethics Survive?

Week 10: Postmodernity

12.2: Technology

12.4: Identity

McLuhan, sf Understanding Media  
Descartes, sf Meditations  
\*Bacigalupi due

Final Exam due during Finals Week

### Official Stuff

1.) Note on Sexual Harassment

The University of Oregon is committed to creating and maintaining a community in which students, faculty and staff can work and study together in an atmosphere free from all forms of prohibited discrimination, and discriminatory harassment. The Office of Affirmative Action & Equal Opportunity (OAA&EO) is available to assist members of the university community in seeking to prevent and correct any prohibited discrimination on campus.

Let me know if you see it happen, don't put up with it from me or anyone else.

2.) What kind of paper deserves an "A," "B," etc.? The following rubric reflects the general standards of the Philosophy Department at the University of Oregon.

**A** = excellent. No mistakes, well-written, and distinctive in some way or other.

**B** = good. No significant mistakes, well-written, but not distinctive in any way.

**C** = OK. Some errors, but a basic grasp of the material.

**D** = poor. Several errors. A tenuous grasp of the material.

**F** = failing. Problematic on all fronts indicating either no real grasp of the material or a complete lack of effort.

Please note: what counts as “excellent” or “OK,” for example, depends in part upon the nature and level of the class in question.

Exam/Paper Grading Scale:

92% or above A

90-92% A- 73-76% C

87-89% B+ 70-72% C-

83-86% B 67-69% D+

80-82% B- 63-66% D

77-79% C+ 60-62% D-

0-59% F

Students registered with the P/NP grading option must receive at least 70% in order to receive a P.

### 3.) Academic Honesty

If you are caught in an act of academic dishonesty, you will receive an “F” for the course. Such acts include:

**Plagiarism:** *Plagiarism is the inclusion of someone else’s product, words, ideas, or data as one’s own work. When a student submits work for credit that includes the product, words, ideas, or data of others, the source must be acknowledged by the use of complete, accurate, and specific references, such as footnotes. By placing one’s name on work submitted for credit, one certifies the originality of all work not otherwise identified by appropriate acknowledgements. Verbatim statements by others must be enclosed by quotation marks or set off from the regular text as indented extracts. Students will avoid being charged with plagiarism if there is acknowledgement of indebtedness. Indebtedness must be acknowledged whenever:*

- 1) one quotes another person’s actual words or replicates all or part of another’s product;
- 2) one uses another person’s ideas, opinions, work, data, or theories, even if they are completely paraphrased in one’s own words;
- 3) one borrows facts, statistics, or other illustrative material—unless the information is common knowledge.

*Unauthorized collaboration with others on papers or projects can inadvertently lead to a charge of plagiarism. If in doubt, consult the instructor or seek assistance from the staff of Academic Learning Services (68 PLC, 346-3226). In addition, it is plagiarism to submit as your own any academic exercise prepared totally or in part by another person, even if that person is acting as a tutor or editor (and ends up substantially producing part of the work).*

**Fabrication:** *Fabrication is the intentional use of information that the author has invented when he or she states or implies*

*otherwise, or the falsification of research or other findings with the intent to deceive. Examples include, but are not limited to:*

- 1) citing information not taken from the source indicated;
- 2) listing sources in a reference not used in the academic exercise;
- 3) inventing data or source information for research or other academic exercises.

**Cheating:** *Cheating is an act of deception by which a student misrepresents or misleadingly demonstrates that he or she has mastered information on an academic exercise that he or she has not mastered, including the giving or receiving of unauthorized help in an academic exercise.*

*Examples include but are not limited to: 1) copying from another student’s work; 2) collaborating without authority or allowing*

*another student to copy one’s work in a test situation; 3) using the course textbook or other material not authorized for use during a test; 4) using unauthorized material during a test; for example, notes, formula lists, cues on a computer, photographs, symbolic representations, and notes written on clothing; 5) resubmitting substantially the same work that was produced for another assignment without the knowledge and permission of the instructor; 6) taking a test for someone else or permitting someone else to take a test for you.*