

FYS 031: Science Fiction and Philosophy
Fall 2018

Meeting time and location: MW 12:30—1:45, Meredith 238.

Professor: Martin Roth, Department of Philosophy and Religion.

Contact information: E-mail: martin.roth@drake.edu; phone: x3748. The best way to reach me is by e-mail. Office hours: MW 8-10:30, or by appointment; Medbury 208.

Peer Mentor and Academic Consultant (PMAC): Jessica Vinaja (jessica.vinaja@drake.edu)

Required books: *Science Fiction and Philosophy: From Time Travel to Superintelligence* (2nd edition), edited by Susan Schneider All other course readings will be made available as .pdfs or links (through Blackboard).

Course description: “*You unlock this door with the key of imagination. Beyond it is another dimension—a dimension of sound, a dimension of sight, a dimension of mind. You’re moving into a land of both shadow and substance, of things and ideas. You’ve just crossed over into the Twilight Zone.*”

Science fiction and philosophy each has a venerable history of using the strange and fantastic to examine and challenge the familiar, and in this course we will use works of science fiction—short stories and films—to introduce and explore a number of long-standing philosophical issues. The topics to be considered in this class may include knowledge and reality, free will and determinism, and the relationship between mind and body.

Learning Objectives: The primary aim of this course is to help students become better critical thinkers, readers, and writers. As such, the course is concerned more with developing skills than it is mastering content. Specifically, this course should foster your ability to:

1. Clearly identify and state relevant problems, questions, or issues.
2. Develop and defend reasonable solutions, answers, or positions on a problem, question, or issue.
3. Provide careful and well supported interpretations of important claims.
4. Effectively communicate a position on an issue.
5. Identify assumptions that inform our reasoning about a problem, question, or issue and make those assumptions explicit.
6. Recognize the ways in which a position may be challenged and acknowledge that reasonable alternatives to a position may exist.
7. Discover and evaluate sources of information or evidence.

Evaluation: Your course grade will be determined by the following factors:

1. The quality of your papers (65% total):

- (a) Paper 1 (around 1600 words): 20%
- (b) Paper 2 (around 2000 words): 25%
- (c) Paper 3 (around 2400 words): 30%

Topics, requirements, and evaluation criteria will be distributed well in advance of each paper. The first paper will be assigned sometime in mid-to-late September. The second paper will be assigned sometime in mid-to-late October. The third paper will be assigned around the end of November or beginning of September.

Writing Workshop: Each student is required to attend a session with a Writing Workshop tutor. These sessions should be used to work on the *second* paper, and failing to attend a tutoring session will lower your grade on that paper. More details about this will be provided when the second paper is assigned. To schedule an appointment, visit this link:

<http://artsci.drake.edu/writersworkshop/wwshop.html>

2. The quality of your participation (25%):

While attendance (“showing up”) is necessary for participation, attendance is not equivalent to participation. Participation requires activity, including asking and answering questions, engaging others in conversation, articulating a position or an objection to a position, and sharing and responding to short writing assignments and other in-class work.

Short writing assignments: In preparation for both class discussions and the longer papers, you will be asked to produce written work for many of the days we meet (about one page, typed and double-spaced). Often these assignments will ask you to respond to course readings, but sometimes they will ask you to respond to in-class discussions. You will be expected to bring a hard copy of your work to class (and turn it in at the end of class), so make sure you have reliable and timely access to a working printer.

Because your participation is being evaluated, there is no additional penalty for missing class. As a corollary, there are no “excused” absences: you cannot participate if you are not here, regardless of the reason for the absence. In order to receive credit for a short writing assignment, you are required to attend class the day the assignment is due.

Academic Honesty: One expectation I have of you deserves special attention: academic honesty. What does this mean? It means, first and foremost, that you do not plagiarize, which is what happens when you represent the ideas of others as your own. The most straightforward example of plagiarism is word-for-word copying, with proper citation not given. Subtler forms include slightly altering the language of others while conveying a point or argument that is not yours. Other examples of academic dishonesty include cheating on an exam and fabricating data/evidence. Academic honesty is the foundation without which academic life makes no sense. As such, if you are determined to have been academically dishonest, you will automatically fail the assignment and quite possibly fail the course (and perhaps face even harsher punishment, e.g. probation or expulsion). Thus, I offer the following advice: if you are unsure whether you are violating Drake's regulations governing academic honesty, ASK ME. Furthermore, I strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with Drake's regulations governing academic honesty: <http://www.drake.edu/catalog/undergrad/14-15/collegeofartsandsciences/academicregulations/>

Content found on Internet sites (such as Wikipedia and other on-line encyclopedias) is not considered common knowledge; as such, using material from such sources without proper citation constitutes academic dishonesty.

Disabilities: If you require academic accommodation because of a disability, please discuss this with me during the first week of the semester. Accommodations are handled through Student Disability Services (Old Main 107). You can contact Michelle Laughlin (the director of SDS) by phone (x 1835) or e-mail: michelle.laughlin@drake.edu.