Philosophy 261
PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS IN SCIENCE FICTION
Fall 2010

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Office Hours: Tuesday 11:30 – 12:30; Friday 11:30 – 12:30; any other time by appointment

FINAL EXAM Tuesday December 16th 12-3 PM

Texts:
*Philosophy and Science Fiction*, edited by Michael Philips
*John Perry*: “A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality”

All other readings are on the reserve in the library.

This course will raise philosophical issues by means of movies and short stories in the genre of science fiction. Once we are aware of the issues and have a general feel for the possible positions one could take, we will read and discuss what philosophers have to say about that issue. Philosophical problems can be express in an especially vivid or compelling manner through science fiction.

GRADING:
Grading will be based on two exams (midterm and the final, 25% and 35% of the grade, respectively), the short writing assignments (32% of the grade), your attendance and successful participation (8% of your grade). A necessary condition for successful participation is having read the relevant work beforehand.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:
You will be required to write a brief discussion of the relevant philosophical problem in our science fiction readings. Try to discuss ideas that you find particularly interesting. For each of our four units, you will be required to write two of these discussions (1-3 pages) except for the fourth unit, where you will write just one discussion of the story and the other about one of the philosophical articles.

Some guidelines:
a) Select a science fiction story (may be a movie).
b) Analyze the work with the special attention to philosophically important developments.
c) Explain what philosophical issue the story raises. This must be a general issue that applies beyond the scope of the particular story (e.g. time travel, free will, etc.)
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. A philosophy paper consists of the reasoned defense of some claim. Your paper must offer an argument. It cannot consist of the mere report of your opinions, nor of a mere report of the opinions of the philosopher you discuss. You have to defend the claims you make.

Due dates for these assignments are at the beginning of each of our four units. That means before we discuss the particular stories (NOT AFTER THE DISCUSSION). The first assignment is due on 14th of September.
ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY (you can miss at most three classes) – more missed classes without a justifiable excuse means lower grade.

The issues we will discuss include time travel, skepticism, personal identity and free will and determinism.

UNIT ONE: Time travel
Film: Twelve Monkeys
Short stories:
1) “All you Zombies” by Robert Heinlein (if you are confused by the story’s timeline, and many are, the following timeline will help: home.alltel.net/dwright/Heinlein/AllYouZombies.html)
2) “By His Bootstrap” by Robert Heinlein
3) “A Sound of Thunder” by Ray Bradbury (an episode of Simpsons)
4) “The Red Queen’s Race” by I. Asimov
Philosophical articles:
1) “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” by David Lewis
2) “Tips for Time Travel” by Monte L. Cook
3) “Dr. Who and the Philosophers or Time-travel for Beginners” by Jonathan Harrison
4) “Time Travel and Modern Physics” by Frank Artenius and Tim Maudlin in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (for advanced students)

UNIT TWO: Personal Identity
Films:
1) Total Recall
   OR
2) Memento
   OR
3) The Prestige
Short stories:
1) “Learning to Be Me” by Greg Egan
2) “Imposter” by Philip K. Dick
3) “The Infinite Assassin” by Greg Egan
4) “We Can Remember It For You Wholesale” by Philip K. Dick
Philosophical articles:
1) “Where Am I?” by Daniel Dennett
2) “What We Believe Ourselves To Be” by Derek Parfit
3) “The Self and the Future” by Bernard Williams
4) “Survival and Identity” by David Lewis
   John Perry: “A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality”

UNIT THREE: Skepticism
Film: Matrix
Short stories:
1) “They” by Robert Heinlein
2) “The Electric Ant” by Philip K. Dick
3) “Precious Artifact” by Philip K. Dick
Philosophical articles:
1) “What’s so Bad About Living in Matrix?” by James Pryor
UNIT FOUR: Free Will and Determinism

Film: Minority Report

Short stories:
1) “Minority Report” by Philip K. Dick
2) “Hundred Light-Year Diary” by Greg Egan

Philosophical articles:
1) “Of Liberty and Necessity” by David Hume
2) “Moral Luck” by Thomas Nagel
3) “I Could Not Have Done Otherwise – So What?” by Daniel Dennett

September:
3rd Introduction to the first unit
7th Time Travel
10th Time Travel
14th Time Travel
17th Time Travel
21st Time Travel
24th Time Travel
28th Time Travel

October:
1st Introduction to the second unit
5th Personal Identity
8th Personal Identity
12th Personal Identity
15th Personal Identity
19th Personal Identity
22nd Personal Identity
26th MIDTERM
29th Introduction to the third unit

November:
2nd Skepticism
5th Skepticism
9th Skepticism
12th Skepticism
16th Skepticism
19th Introduction to the forth unit
23rd Free Will and Determinism
30th Free Will and Determinism

THANKSGIVING BREAK

December:
3rd Free Will and Determinism
7th Free Will and Determinism
10th Free Will and Determinism