

PHIL206 – Philosophy in Science Fiction

**Masks are required in class.
Students not wearing them
(PROPERLY) will be asked to leave,
or removed by campus security.**

Instructor:

Dr. C. Stinson (she/her or they/them)

Description:

This is an introduction to topics in philosophy through accessible science fiction stories about robots, alien intelligences, future technologies, mad scientists, dystopias, and virtual realities. Topics will span philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, bioethics, epistemology, and metaphysics. Each topic will be approached through text (short story, novel) and visual media (film, music video, comic, game), and connect to discussion of real-world issues. Course materials will include a mix of science fiction classics, popular contemporary fare, and works that challenge the genre's boundaries.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this course students should know:

- about some philosophical questions and positions on those questions
- how to weigh arguments for and against a position
- how to use thought experiments as tools to aid philosophical analysis
- how to write a philosophical essay
- how to connect philosophical questions to everyday life.

Required Materials:

Many of the stories and films will be made available to you on Teams.

Stories and films available for free online are linked in the schedule.

Films available through the Queen's library's Kanopy service are marked (Q).

Films available through the Kingston public library's Kanopy service are marked (K). Anyone with a Queen's student card can get a public library account.

Films/shows available on Netflix are marked (N). You will need access to Netflix.

Books you'll need (available in the campus bookstore):

Annalee Newitz, *Autonomous*

Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti: Home* (the 2nd part of the Binti trilogy)

Morrison & Quitely, *All Star Superman*

Short story collections the course draws from:

Octavia Butler, *Bloodchild and Other Stories*

Bill Campbell & Edward Austin Hall (eds.), *Mothership: Tales from Afrofuturism and Beyond*

Ted Chiang, *Exhalation: Stories*

Ken Liu, *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories*

Hope Nicholson (ed.), *Love Beyond Body, Space and Time: An Indigenous LGPT Sci-fi Anthology*

Joshua Whitehead (ed.), *Love After the End: An Anthology of Two-Spirit & Indigiqueer Speculative Fiction*

Selected resources the lectures will draw on (for reference only):

Kathryn Allan, *Disability in Science Fiction: Representations of Technology as Cure*

Mel Baggs, [Ballastexistenz](#) (blog)

Toby Beauchamp, *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices*

Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*

Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory*

Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*

Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Anti-Black World*

Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*

Annalee Newitz & Charlie Jane Anders, [Our Opinions are Correct](#) (podcast)

Sami Schalk, *Bodyminds Reimagined: (Dis)ability, Race, and Gender in Black Women's Speculative Fiction*

Allucquère Roseanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*

Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*

Ytasha L Womack, *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*

Assessments:

Essay	45%
Group Project	25%
Project Abstract	2%
Reading Response Quizzes	8 x 2%
Small Assignments	2 x 6%

Essay:

Using one or more of the Sci-Fi works we've discussed, defend a position on a contemporary philosophical problem.

Stage 1: Write a complete draft. (15%)

Stage 2: Complete peer reviews of 2 other students' paper drafts. (10%)

Stage 3: Rewrite the essay based on peer reviews to produce a final draft. (20%)

Group project:

In a group of 2-4 students, come up with a concept for an original Sci-Fi movie/book/game/comic, based on a current scientific project, social issue, or political situation.

Produce a sample that communicates the concept in an audio and/or visual format (video trailer, storyboard, sketches for a comic, podcast teaser, game mockup, ...).

Project abstract:

Produce a 1 page document that lists your project group members, and summarizes the initial idea(s) for your project in 200-250 words.

Reading response quizzes:

Throughout the course there will be short, untimed, open book quizzes on OnQ that ask for a brief response to the week's reading/viewing. The top 8 will be counted. These are due before the Tuesday lecture, but will remain open for late submissions.

Small Assignments:

You may submit these assignments in either order. Due dates are Oct 11, Nov 15.

- a) Create a meme that draws on Sci-Fi media to make a philosophical point.
- b) Propose a Sci-Fi work and associated philosophical topic to consider including in the course next year.

Extensions, Trigger Warnings, Pandemic Contingency Plans:

A grace period will be built into all due dates in OnQ. You do not need to ask for permission or show any paperwork to be granted an extension.

Submitting your Essay Draft after peer reviewers have been assigned will put you in a pool of late reviewers where timely feedback on your draft cannot be guaranteed, and administrative chaos may ensue. Late peer reviews may anger your classmates.

Some of the content we'll be reading, watching, and discussing is disturbing, including scenes of abuse, violence, enslavement, gore, racism, and ableism. If you have specific triggers, please look up the films and stories in advance, or ask the TAs for details. You should skip any required reading/viewing, and associated quiz and class if the material would traumatize you. The TAs or instructor can suggest alternative material to read/watch. If you need to skip more than 2 quizzes/weeks, please talk to the instructor.

If/when public health advice leads to the end of in person teaching, classes will move to Teams meetings during the regularly scheduled class times, lectures may be shortened, and one class per week may be split into sections led by the TAs. The instructor commutes from Toronto, so travel restrictions in Toronto may lead to lectures going online even if Queen's remains open.

The Fine Print

This page of standard syllabus elements (<https://www.cs.queensu.ca/students/undergraduate/syllabus/year2021-22.php>) is part of this syllabus. You are expected to be familiar with everything on that page.

Schedule (subject to change):

Week	Lecture Dates	Topic	Required reading/viewing	Work due
1	Sept 7, 9	What is Sci-Fi? What is Philosophy?	Course Syllabus <u>LeGuin, Intro to The Left Hand of Darkness</u>	
2	Sept 14, 16	Identity	Newitz, <i>Autonomous</i> Ch 1-7 Jemisin, "Too Many Yesterdays, Not Enough Tomorrows" Solaris (Q)	Quiz 1
3	Sept 21, 23	Gender	Newitz, <i>Autonomous</i> Ch 8-16 Kurisato, "Imposter Syndrome" Star Trek TNG S5 E17: The Outcast (N)	Quiz 2
4	Sept 28, 30	Cyborgs	Newitz, <i>Autonomous</i> Ch 16-23 Chiang, "Exhalation" Ghost in the Shell (K)	Quiz 3 Assignment 1
5	Oct 5, 7	Race & Species	Okja (N) Bojack Horseman S2E5: Chickens (N) <u>Clppng, "The Deep"</u>	Quiz 4 Essay draft
		Fall Break		Peer review 1
6	Oct 19, 21	Nature & Technology	<u>Avatar</u> Okorafor, <i>Binti: Home</i> Love, Death & Robots: Ice Age (N)	Quiz 5 Peer review 2
7	Oct 26, 28	Monsters	Edward Scissorhands <u>Butler, "The Evening and the Morning and the Night"</u> King Kong (K)	Quiz 6 Project Abstract
8	Nov 2, 4	(Dis)ability	The Girl with all the Gifts (N) Butler, "Speech Sounds" Daredevil S1E1 (N)	Quiz 7
9	Nov 9, 11	Superpowers	Scanners (K) X-Men Morrison & Quitely, <i>All Star Superman</i>	Quiz 8 Final essay
10	Nov 16, 18	Aliens	Arrival (N) <u>Chiang, "The Great Silence"</u> Star Trek TNG S5E2: Darmok (N)	Quiz 9 Assignment 2
11	Nov 23, 25	Ideal Worlds	The Good Place S3E8 (N) Liu, "The Waves" <u>The Last Angel of History</u> Jones, "History of the New World"	Quiz 10
12	Nov 30, Dec 2	Group Project Presentations		Group Project