

# **Topics in Philosophy:**

## **Philosophy in Science Fiction**

Philosophy 340  
Fall 2008, Catalog #8855  
Humanities 20, MWF 1:40-2:35  
<http://psf.profron.net>

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Office Hours: Tue 11-12 and Fri 10-11

### **Readings/Materials:**

**E-Reserves:** Readings will be available on the course e-reserves page as PDF files. The e-reserves password will be given out in class.

**Books:** None ordered at this time; addition(s) possible

**Videos:** Videos will be available online as streaming *RealMedia*

### **Requirements:**

**Papers:** Topics for short (about 1200 words) papers will be handed out four times during the semester, and will be due about a week after being assigned. You must do two of these, including at least one of the first two. (See the *Addenda* page for the rules on late papers.) Each short paper is worth 20% of the final course grade.

**Exams:** There will be three 55-minute in class closed-book tests, spaced relatively equally throughout the semester. Tests are mostly short-answer format, and will be non-comprehensive. (See the *Addenda* page for the rules on makeup exams.) Your two best exam scores are each worth 20% of the final course grade

**Participation, etc.:** Class participation, quizzes, and other stuff will total 20% of your course grade. This will include the following, and perhaps more: Every several classes, I will hold "Chat Day", in which we devote a class to a question-and-answer and discussion period; you'll be expected to come prepared and to participate. There will also be an online discussion board for the course (linked from the course web page); students will occasionally be asked to contribute to the online discussion as part of the participation grade. I may occasionally give a short in-class "pop" quiz, and I will occasionally ask for other small bits of work – e.g., a paragraph on some very particular question, to a question or two you have about the readings, or whatever. I may ask for these to be submitted by email or by web posting. Note that if you don't attend class, that's clearly non-participation, and will be graded accordingly.

**Summary:** Grades will be 20% for each of two short papers, 20% for each of your two best exam grades, and 20% for class participation/etc.

### **Course topic outline:** (Very tentative; expect changes)

#### **Minds, bodies, machines, & selves**

Selves and transporters; minds, robots, and other machines

#### **The real and the virtual:**

Memories, real and artificial; virtual realities and knowledge

#### **Time travel and paradox:**

Paradox, inconsistency and time-lines; time travel and freedom

#### **Freedom, determinism, and choice:**

Actions as caused & predictable; room for freedom & responsibility?

#### **Moral choices:**

The greatest good for the greatest number; intervention and relativism

#### **Human flourishing:**

Drugs, VR, and other pleasures; artificially enhanced selves

#### **Gods and other beings:**

Meeting god(s); what does it take to be a god?

#### **Contingency, chaos, and meaning:**

Fate, purpose, and (no) reasons for things

# PHI 340 Syllabus Addenda (Fall 2008 – McClamrock)

## Paper Submission Guidelines:

- All papers must be submitted both electronically and in hard copy. Electronic copies should normally be transmitted to me as documents attached to a piece of e-mail addressed to me at [ron@albany.edu](mailto:ron@albany.edu).
- Electronic documents sent to me should be saved in the format known as **RTF** ("Rich Text Format"). Almost all word processors will save and load RTF. Please, no *Microsoft Word* "docx" documents, or any other such proprietary format. Note that to save as RTF, you can't just change the file extension to "RTF"; you need to use "Save As" under your "File" menu and select RTF as the file type.
- Name the file you send to me as "Lastname\_Firstname\_340A1Q1.rtf", substituting your name in for "Lastname\_Firstname", and the appropriate assignment and question numbers in place of "A1" and "Q1". So, for example: Assignment #2 written on Question 3 from student Eric Cartman should be named "Cartman\_Eric\_340A2Q3.rtf".
- Please format papers simply, single-spaced, with your name, the assignment and question number, and any title you might give to the paper at the top of the first page (don't use a separate title page). I'd prefer that the text font be 12pt Times-Roman or Helvetica and that the left margin be 1" and the right margin 2.5". Please also include page numbers and a word count. You can get a sample formatted this way that will give you a template or model from the web page.
- When you send papers to me, please cc: yourself to make sure everything worked OK.

## Missed Exams:

Makeup exams are given only when extreme circumstances make it *impossible* for you to take the test when given; e.g., when you are hospitalized on that day. If you miss an exam for some other kind of reason, just take the other two, and the missed exam will be dropped.

In these extreme circumstances, in order to be given a makeup exam, you must do all of the following.

1. You must obtain a letter of excuse from the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Studies; all inquiries about such letters and the documentation required for them should be directed to the Dean's office (LC-30). This request (with documentation) is to be made to the Dean's office no more than two weekdays after the end of the period for which you are asking to be excused. (Graduate student should come to me directly concerning documentation.)
2. Give me a written (e-mail is best, paper is OK) request for a makeup exam. This request should be given to me no more than two weekdays after the end of the period for which your absence has been excused.
3. Talk to me in person at the end of the first class after your excused absence in order to schedule a makeup.

You must do all of these in order to be given a makeup. But even if you do, I reserve the right to judge that the excuse is inadequate, in which case I may decline to give the makeup.

## Late papers:

Late papers are marked down by one grade notch (e.g. B to B or B- to C+) for every hour or portion thereof I receive them after the due date and time. The only exception is the one noted under "Missed exams": If there are such extreme circumstances, and a paper is due during an excused absence, you may get an extension until the first day not covered by the excused absence. In such a case, the paper is due on that day, at the same time of day it was originally due.

## Grade Calculation Rules:

1. Every graded piece of work (exam, paper, whatever) is given a letter grade. These letter grades range from A+ (the best) to F (the worst).
2. Each of these letter grades has a numerical equivalent. Here are the possible letter grades and numerical equivalents:

A+ = 15	C- = 7
A = 14	D+ = 6
A- = 13	D = 5
B+ = 12	D- = 4
B = 11	E+ = 3
B- = 10	E = 2
C+ = 9	E- = 1
C = 8	F = 0

"Slash" grades like "A-/B+" are equivalent to the midpoint between the two grades; e.g., a grade of A-/B+ is calculated as a 12.5.

3. Once this assignment of letter grades is made for, say, a given exam, nothing else matters. In calculating your final grade, all that matters is (the numerical equivalents of) your various letter grades for the various graded pieces of work.
4. I use the numerical equivalents of the letter grades to calculate a composite numerical grade using whatever procedure I've specified for the particular class.
5. I round the composite numerical grade to the nearest integer (.5 and above go up, below go down).
6. I convert back to letter grades using the chart above. You get the letter grade determined by the chart, except if (i) you got an A+, in which case your official grade is an A (the University doesn't use A+), or (ii) you got lower than a D-, in which case your official grade is E. Note that for graduate students, the only passing grades are B and above.

## On getting a grade of "I":

The grade of "I" (Incomplete) will be given only if you an excuses absence of the sort described under "Missed Exams" prevents you from either taking the last of the exams or turning in the last of the papers. In addition to following the procedures describe under "Missed Exams", you must also ask me in writing (email is best) to assign you an "I" for the course.