

Philosophy 4444: A.I., Sci-Fi, and Human Values
EP4 Value Seminar
Fall 2020

Course Number	PHIL 4444 / CRN: 43662 / L01
Day Time Location	Tuesday / Friday 1:00 – 2:15PM Online

Instructor Information

Dr. Philip J. Walsh

Office hours: Tuesday/Friday 2:30 – 4:30PM and by appointment (all office hours conducted using Zoom)

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Course Description

The field of artificial intelligence (AI) and the genre of science fiction (sci-fi) both investigate what it means to be human. Furthermore, the possibility of AI has been a perennial favorite topic of science fiction. This course will simultaneously investigate the philosophical underpinnings of AI and how depictions of AI in popular science fiction give cultural voice to humanity's deepest values. Among other themes, we will examine: the philosophical foundations of artificial intelligence research in the Enlightenment and Romantic traditions; Heidegger's critique of enlightenment rationality and technology; feminist critiques of AI and its philosophical assumptions. We will explore these themes through in-depth discussions of classic science fiction texts such as: *Frankenstein*, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*, and the seminal Kubrick film *2001: A Space Odyssey*; and contemporary films such as *Ex Machina* and *Her*.

Required texts

- Brian Cantwell Smith, *The Promise of Artificial Intelligence: Reckoning and Judgment*. (2019). MIT Press. ISBN: 9780262043045
- Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*. (1994). Dover Thrift Editions. ISBN: 9780486282114
- Karel Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*. (2004). Penguin Classics. ISBN: 9780141182087
- All other readings will be made available on the course website
- Films and other media are considered required reading and will be available through the course website via Fordham Library databases such as "Kanopy" and "Swank."
- A few of the pieces of media we are using are not available through the library. You are required to find a way to watch these. They are available for rent, and quite affordable, on platforms like Amazon and Youtube. We will discuss other options further in class.

Learning Objectives

- Understand the history of artificial intelligence research and the underlying philosophical issues

- Evaluate ways in which science fiction expresses cultural values through the lens of its depictions of artificial intelligence
- Criticize underlying assumptions in both artificial intelligence research and fictional depictions of AI

Course Format

- All aspects of the course will be conducted fully online
- The course will include asynchronous and synchronous aspects:
 - Asynchronous: assigned readings and viewings; video lectures; discussion boards
 - Synchronous: discussion sessions using Zoom during regularly scheduled class time
- Synchronous discussion format:
 - The class will be divided into two equal groups: Group A and Group B
 - Group A will meet on Zoom Tuesday/Friday from 1:00 – 1:35PM; Group B will meet Tuesday/Friday 1:40 – 2:15PM

Grading

Letter Grade	Numerical equivalent	Meaning of the Grade
A	94-100	Excellent. Honors-level work, outstanding.
A-	90-93	Still excellent.
B+	87-89	Very good. High Level of performance.
B	83-86	Good. Solid and above average level of performance.
B-	80-82	Good. Still above average.
C+	77-79	Average level of performance.
C	73-76	Satisfactory. Acceptable level of performance.
C-	70-72	Minimally acceptable.
D	65-69	Passing, but unsatisfactory. Below average performance.
F	<65	Failure. Inferior performance.

Standards for Distinguishing between Excellent, Good, Average and Poor:

- Professionalism: Papers should demonstrate good grammar as well as good spelling. They should also be copy-edited to reduce or eliminate typos.
- Writing Quality: Writing should be clear and exhibit good structure. Paragraphs should be cohesive and build towards a complete essay with a substantial thesis (as opposed to a string of disconnected thoughts).
- Accuracy and Understanding: Papers should be able accurately to re-create an argument or a position. They should find the relevant issues and argument(s) worthy of analysis.
- Argument: Papers should argue for or against a position rather than merely exchange opinions. Is the argument for or against a position constructed persuasively within the confines of the paper? (Note: I am not looking for your argument to be true — there is no need to guess my opinion. What I want to see is *persuasion*.)

Grade Breakdown

- 3 short (2-3 page) position papers: 10% each = 30%
 - 2 can be rewritten
- Final paper (8-10 page): 30%
 - Drafting process: 15%
 - Final document: 15%
- Oral presentation: 10%
- Participation: 30%
 - VoiceThread discussion posts and replies

Writing Assignments

- Short papers
 - You will write 3 short (2-3 pages) “position” papers, in which you respond to a short prompt about the course material. I will post a separate document with several different prompts to choose from, along with specific due dates throughout the entire semester.
 - You will be permitted to rewrite 2 of these upon my initial grading and feedback. The grade for a rewrite can only be one full letter grade higher than the initial grade.
- Final paper
 - Your final paper (8-10 pages) will be due during finals week. I will post a separate explanatory document on formulating a topic and devising a strategy.
 - Drafting and revising will be a major part of the final paper process. There will be deadlines for drafts so that everyone’s paper can go through a process of peer review and individual conferencing with Dr. Walsh

Oral Presentation

- Each student will be responsible for leading synchronous class discussion for one session
- Your presentation should include time for you to summarize the reading/viewing, relate it to the ongoing context of material covered so far, and develop some of your own ideas about it
- You do not need to spend the entire time talking; you are *leading* a discussion section, so you should think about ways to prompt the group to engage with the material you are presenting
- More details on separate document

Participation

- A major challenge of online education is participation. Accordingly, participation credit is a major part of your overall grade in order to incentivize consistent and substantive engagement.
- We will use VoiceThread in place of the traditional discussion board. VoiceThread allows for written, audio, or video posts.
 - You are required to make 15 original VoiceThread posts throughout the semester. Your post should be a substantive question about the assigned

- o material for that day (more details on discussion question document)
- o You are also required to make 15 replies to other students' questions throughout the semester (again, more details on discussion question document)

Plagiarism:

The instructor reserves the right to deal with instances of plagiarism on a case by case basis. Penalties for plagiarism may include, but are not limited to:

- A reduced grade on an assignment
- Receiving a zero for the assignment
- Failure of the entire course

JUST DON'T DO IT. It is not worth it. It is easier than ever to plagiarize today, and it is easier than ever for your professor to catch you. If you are unsure if something counts as plagiarism (such as if/how you should cite something), just ask me, that's what I'm here for. It is better to ask and error on the side of caution.

From Fordham's student handbook:

Violations of Academic Integrity:

A. Plagiarism: Plagiarism occurs when individuals attempt to present as their own what has come from another source. Plagiarism takes place whether such theft is accidental or deliberate. Examples of plagiarism include but are not limited to:

- Failing to acknowledge the ideas of another person, whether or not such ideas are paraphrased, from whatever source including oral, print, broadcast or computer-mediated communication.
- Attempting to rewrite borrowed material by simply dropping a word here and there, substituting a few words for others, or moving around words or sentences.
- Failing to place quotation marks around borrowed material in the approved style. It is no defense to claim that one has "forgotten" to do so.
- Presenting as one's own an assignment, paper or computer program partially or wholly prepared by another person, whether by another student, friend, or by a business or on-line service that sells or distributes such papers and programs.

Some advice on plagiarism and paraphrasing from Joe Williams and Larry McEnerney, "Writing in College," in *Engaging the Humanities at the University of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 206-207.

Here is a simple test for inadvertent plagiarism: be conscious of where your eyes are as you put words on paper or on a screen. If your eyes are on your source at the same moment your fingers are flying across the keyboard, you risk doing something that weeks, months, even years later could result in your public humiliation. Whenever you use a source extensively, compare your page with the original. If you think someone could run her finger along your sentences and find synonyms or synonymous phrases for words in the original in roughly the same order, try again. You are least likely to plagiarize inadvertently if as you write, you keep your eyes not on your source, but on the screen or on your own page, and you report what your source has to say after those words have

filtered through your own understanding of them.

Class policies

- “A friend is one before whom I may think aloud” –Emerson

My fundamental policy in this class is to have a class environment of mutual respect where we help one another achieve our course objectives. The course policies in this section are designed to help achieve that environment.

Correspondence

- Email is the best way to reach me. I will reply to all emails within one business day.
- Class announcements and other information about the course readings, schedule changes, due dates, etc. will all happen through Fordham email and our course website. It is your responsibility to check your Fordham email daily and have access to the course website.
- General tip for emailing college professors: always error on the side of formality. You would be amazed how many emails I get that begin with “Hey” or no greeting at all. Email is a form of professional communication and has different rules than texting. When emailing a professor or TA or generally *anyone* other than your close friends and family, begin the email with “Dear Professor...,” and end it with “Sincerely...” or “Best...”.

Synchronous Zoom Discussion

- Please keep your camera on. This is not a requirement, as I feel this would be a strong intrusion into people’s privacy, but it really does enhance the overall quality of online discussion. When everyone’s camera is on, you are more “beholden” the ongoing conversation. When you turn your camera off, it is very easy to get distracted and disengage from the discussion.
- The same general standards of appearance for in-person class apply to Zoom discussion sections. (I’m not saying you need to put on make-up, style your hair, or get dressed up... but don’t show up in your swimsuit either OK?). Ditto for food/drink. An inconspicuous snack and a drink are fine. But don’t have your lunch during class.

Attendance

- I will not be taking attendance during our synchronous sessions, and I will try to be as flexible as possible with facilitating asynchronous options, but you should still think of attendance as mandatory for this course. You will greatly benefit from real-time interaction with me and your peers, plus this will help you get a feel for how to put together your oral presentation and lead your own discussion section when the time comes.

Late work policy

- Late work will be penalized one full letter grade per day late.
- Extensions are only granted for exceptional circumstances, and solely at the instructor’s discretion. An excess of work for other courses, family events, or your employment schedule are not sufficient reasons for seeking an extension.

- Carefully look at the course schedule, the assignments, and due dates. Budget your time accordingly.

Class Preparedness

- **ALWAYS BRING THE ASSIGNED READING TO CLASS**
- You should complete the assigned material on the course schedule *before* class meets.
- Reading philosophy is often slow and difficult work. You will not likely be able to read these texts as quickly or as fluently as you can read other texts. Allow yourself ample time, look up words you don't understand, and assume that most texts will require re-reading.
- My personal advice is to complete the reading before class and write down questions you have or things you don't understand. After class, go back and review the reading once more.

Capstone Statement

This course provides students with a robust set of conceptual tools for discussing human values depicted in science fiction, philosophy, and appraisals of AI. It provides a capstone experience in several respects. First, it brings together in a thematic way many diverse elements of Fordham's core curriculum. Its discussion of value and morality speaks to a number of Jesuit principles, such as *cura personalis*, that is, caring for the individual. Throughout the course, students are encouraged to reflect upon the material's implications for their own lives, interactions with one another, and with the technological landscape of contemporary society. The oral and written assignments described on the syllabus are designed to challenge students to synthesize various elements of the core curriculum with an eye to deepening the ways they discuss, understand, and evaluate technology, the possibilities created by AI, and the distinctive character of human value. Through those same assignments, the course achieves the core curriculum's goal of *Eloquentia Perfecta*; students who successfully complete the course will have strengthened their capacity to understand, formulate, and evaluate arguments, and to discuss challenging ideas both verbally and in writing. Moreover, the course's emphasis on humanity builds upon Fordham's mission of social justice. By engaging with the topic of what makes humans valuable, students are asked to think with a view towards improving the human community and respecting the dignity which is inherent in each human individual. In addition to these overarching goals, the course provides opportunity for interdisciplinary reflection on the material's implications for various fields, including computer science, information technology, neuroscience and biology. Finally, it brings together and more deeply explores themes introduced to all students at Fordham University in their core philosophy courses, namely, questions about the unique nature and value of human life in *Philosophy of Human Nature* and *Philosophical Ethics*.

Disability Statement:

Fordham University, in compliance with state and federal laws and regulations, does not discriminate on the basis of disability in administration of its education related programs and activities. We have an institutional commitment to provide equal educational opportunities for disabled students who are otherwise qualified. Students seeking services should meet with Disability Services staff for an initial intake meeting to develop an accommodation plan directly with the student in accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of

1973 and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. For more information please visit: https://www.fordham.edu/info/20174/disability_services

Mandatory Reporting Policy

As a faculty member, I am a mandatory reporter and am required to contact and provide information to Public Safety, to the Dean of Students, and/or to the Title IX Coordinator if I learn you have been sexually harassed (verbally or physically), sexually assaulted/raped, stalked, had domestic violence or dating violence occur in a relationship, or been a victim/survivor of any behavior prohibited by the University's Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures. There are three confidential places on campus where you can seek support where it will not be "reported": clinical counselors in Psychological & Counseling Services, pastoral counselors in Campus Ministry, and medical service providers in University Health Services. The Student CARE Brochure can provide you with on and off-campus resources for support and more information, and you can also visit www.fordham.edu/care or www.fordham.edu/sexualmisconduct for more information.

Course Schedule (subject to change at discretion of instructor)

Day	Topic	Assigned Readings
8/28	Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course introduction
9/1	Enlightenment rationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descartes, <i>Discourse on Method</i> Part V • Descartes, <i>Meditations</i>, selections from 2nd & 6th Meditations
9/4	GOFAI, Consciousness, and Cognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smith Ch. 1-2 • <u>Searle's Chinese Room thought experiment</u> (youtube)
9/8	The failure of GOFAI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smith Ch. 3-4
9/11	The Romantic critique of mechanistic thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coleridge, <i>Theory of Life</i>, pp. 13-22; 27-29; 50-66
9/15	Enlightenment & Romantic values in <i>Frankenstein</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Frankenstein</i>, 1-108
9/18	Enlightenment & Romantic values in <i>Frankenstein</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Frankenstein</i>, 108-166
9/22	AI as Promethean myth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hesiod, Prometheus myth • Hadot, "Prometheus and Orpheus"
9/25	AI as Promethean myth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Prometheus</i> (2012 film)
9/29	Machine Learning: The new paradigm in AI research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smith Ch. 5-6
10/2	Algorithmic profiling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The Precrime Unit," <i>Hi-Phi Nation</i> (podcast) • Optional: "Risky Business," <i>Hi-Phi Nation</i> (podcast)
10/6	Algorithmic profiling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • de Vries, "Identity, Profiling Algorithms, and a World of Ambient Intelligence"
10/9	Algorithmic profiling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Black Mirror</i>, "Nosedive" (Netflix)
10/13	Algorithmic profiling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Westworld</i>, "The Absence of Field (HBO)
10/16	Heidegger's critique of technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"
10/20	Heidegger's critique of technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology"
10/23	The invention of the robot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)</i>, prologue – Act I

10/27	The invention of the robot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R.U.R., Act II – Act III
10/30	Enlightenment rationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” • Nussbaum, “Human Dignity and Political Entitlements”
11/3		<p>NO CLASS / ELECTION HOLIDAY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optional: read Asimov’s classic short story, “Reason”
11/6	Worldhood & Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smith Ch. 9-10
11/10	Defies thematization!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i>
11/13	Defies thematization!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i>
11/17	AI and culpability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dennett, “Did HAL Commit Murder?”
11/20	Feminist critique of AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haraway, “The Cyborg Manifesto”
11/24	Feminist critique of AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davion, “Anthropocentrism, Artificial Intelligence, and Moral Network Theory: An Ecofeminist Perspective”
11/27		<p>NO CLASS / THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY</p>
12/1	Feminist critique of AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ex Machina</i>
12/4	Feminist critique of AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Her</i>
12/8		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cushion day; no assigned reading
	Exam week	<p>FINAL PAPER DUE FRIDAY 12/8</p>