

## Philosophy 100-01 (First Year Class):

### Philosophy of the Future



We all hope and work for a bright future, even if we sometimes fear the worst. But what exactly *is* this future we care so much about, and for what sort of future *should* we strive? This class introduces fundamental problems of philosophy by exploring metaphysical, epistemological and ethical problems about the future. We begin with the central concerns of philosophy itself: what is real? what do I know? what is good? what really matters? We then consider the puzzling nature of the future, which we value immensely though it seems not fully *real*. Are the past and present more real than the future? This raises interesting questions of our moral attitude to the future: do we have obligations to persons and generations that do not yet exist or no longer exist? Might we have an obligation to ensure that someone does (or does not) exist in the future? Future humans will face ethical issues in the future that are working thinking about in the present. For example, is it acceptable for future humans to colonize other planets as past humans have colonized other continents? There are a number of threats that may prevent a human future altogether: war; climate change; disease. How do we gauge these threats and act accordingly? And if it turns out we are doomed, how would this affect the meaning of the life we have left? If we survive, human nature is likely to undergo significant change with the rise of technologies like artificial intelligence, genetic engineering and bio-medical enhancement. Are these enhancements good for us? Are we ready to become ‘trans-human’? Finally, how can we (in the present) ensure a good future for those to come?

**Class meetings:** TTh 9:40-11:10, Neill 110. **Office Hours:** T 3-4, W 1-2 and by appointment.

**Instructor:** Prof. Geoffrey Gorham; **Email:** ggorham; **Office:** Old Main 110; **Phone:** x6048

**Preceptor/Writing Assistant:** Elizabeth (Lizzy) Harte **Email:** eharte

**Readings:** This is a textbook-less class. All readings will be available on moodle as pdf unless otherwise indicated, e.g. online (O) or email (E). Many readings will be already posted to moodle at the beginning of the course but some may be added or changed later. You may either print out the readings for class, or bring your favorite platform for viewing electronic texts. Online activity during class time, apart from what is necessary to download and read assigned texts, is prohibited. Enforcement of this prohibition is by mutual agreement and honor rather than policing/penalty.

#### Course Requirements

**1. Examinations.** There will be one mid-term exam and one final exam. The mid-term will be during our usual class time on **October 20**. The final exam will be during the officially scheduled exam time

**December 17.** Each exam will be based on readings, lectures, films, handouts and discussions and will consist mostly of short-essay questions. The final exam will be non-cumulative.

**2. Papers.** Students will write **four** philosophical papers, each approximately 5 double-spaced pages in length, on assigned topics covered in class. A choice of assigned topics will be distributed at least one week before the due date. Due dates are listed in the class schedule below. Grammar, spelling, and style will be given some consideration in the determination of grades, although content will be the primary factor.

**3. Attendance and Participation.** This will be a discussion-based class. Students are expected to complete all assigned readings prior to the meeting in which they will be discussed, attend all class meetings, including film viewings, and participate in class discussion. If you always attend all class and film viewings, come prepared, and contribute to discussion with reasonable frequency, you should expect to receive 10/10 points; otherwise, you will receive less than 10. Film showings and outings count, so absence from these will reduce your grade.

**4. Lightning Reading Response.** At the beginning of five un-announced classes, students will write a brief (1-page max) response to a prompt about one of the class readings for that day. These are intended to improve your timed test writing and encourage careful preparation for class. Just as importantly, they will provide material for class discussion. Responses will be graded 2 (excellent), 1 (satisfactory) or 0 (unsatisfactory) by the preceptor.

**5. Film Viewings/Discussions.** We will watch 3 films together (Sunday evenings) and discuss 2 others in class. Attendance at communal film viewings and discussions is required in accordance with the policy on "Attendance, Participation." directly above. "I already saw this" or "I'll watch it on my own" do not excuse you from attendance at viewings except under very special circumstances.

**Grading:** Exams and papers will be grades using points (e.g. 17.5/20) and the simple sum of all points for the semester will be converted to a final letter grade using the following scale.

Mid-Term Exam:	40 points	A =	187 - 200 pts	C =	147 - 153 pts
Final Exam:	50 points	A- =	180 - 186 pts	C- =	140 - 146 pts
Four Papers:	20 points (each)	B+ =	174 - 179 pts	D+ =	134 - 139 pts
Lightning Responses:	10 points (total)	B =	167 - 173 pts	D =	127 - 133 pts
Attendance and Participation:	20 points	B- =	160 - 166 pts	D- =	120 - 126 pts
Total:	200 points	C+ =	154 - 159 pts	F =	0 - 119 pts

**Disabilities.** I am happy to make appropriate accommodations for documented disabilities, as provided by College policy. Please make contact with Associate Dean of Students, Lisa Landreman, and then let me know how I can help. **Religious Holidays.** I am happy to make accommodations for you to observe religious holidays and practices, as provided by College policy. I appreciate advance notice of absence for religious observance. **Academic Misconduct** such as cheating and plagiarism will be dealt with in accordance with College policy and procedures. Please talk to me if you have any uncertainty about what constitutes plagiarism and cheating.

#### **Class Schedule** (subject to small changes):

08.29: 10-11am in Neill 110. **Introductions**

#### **1. What is Philosophy?**

09.03: Plato: *Meno*; *Republic* (i) and (ii)

09.06: **Sunday film:** *The Matrix*

09.08: Descartes: *Meditations* 1 and 2.

09.10: Schopenhauer: *On the Vanity of Existence*; Camus: *Myth of Sisyphus*: Sleep Project visitor.

09.13: **Outing**: Weisman Art Museum (U of Minnesota): 'Local Time' exhibit

## 2. What is the Future?

09.15: Aristotle: *De Interpretatione* (E); St. Augustine: *Confessions* (E)

09.17: Newton: *Principia*; Leibniz-Clarke: *Correspondence*

09.22: McTaggart: 'The Unreality of Time'. **First Paper Due**

09.24: Harrison: 'Dr. Who and the Philosophers'; Lewis: 'Paradoxes of Time Travel'

09.27: **Sunday film**: *Primer* (watch on your own online)

## 3. Ethics of the Future

09.29: Kant: *Metaphysics of Morals*

10.01: Mill: *Utilitarianism*; Library 'Information Fluency' Session; **Dinner at Prof. Gorham's House**

10.06: Nietzsche: *Beyond Good and Evil*; Rawls: *Theory of Justice*

10.08: Parfit: 'The Repugnant Conclusion'; 'On Doing the Best for our Children'; Kavka, 'The Futurity Problem'.

10.13: Feinberg: 'The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations'; Harman: 'Creation Ethics'. **Second Paper Due**

10.15: English: 'Justice between Generations'; Fishkin: 'The Limits of Intergenerational Justice'.

10.20: **Mid-term Exam** (in class)

10.22: **Fall Break!**

10.27: Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics* (E); Epicurus: *Principle Doctrines* (E); Lucretius: *De Rerum Natura*

10.29: Nagel 'Death'; Rosenbaum: 'How to be Dead and not Care: A Defense of Epicurus'.

11.03: N. Prantzos: *Our Cosmic Future*; Zubrin and Walker: *The Case for Mars*.

11.05: Sparrow: 'The Ethics of Terraforming'; Fogg: 'Ethical Dimensions of Space Settlement':  
Discussion: *Interstellar*

## 4. The End of the World: Catastrophe and Extinction

11.10: Frame and Allen: 'Climate Change and Global Risk'; Singer: Preventing Human Extinction. **Third Paper Due**

11.12: Weisman: *The World Without Us*; Adams: 'Long Term Astrophysical Processes'.

11.15: **Sunday Film**: *Children of Men*

11.17: Scheffler, *Death and the Afterlife*; B. Trisel, 'Human Extinction and the Value of Our Efforts'

## 5. Enhancement and Transhumanism

11.19: Locke: *Essay*; Hughes: 'Transhumanism and Personal Identity'.

11.22: **Sunday Film**: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

11.24: Descartes: *Discourse on the Method*; Searle: 'Minds, Brains and Programs'; Goertzel: 'Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity'.

11.26: **Thanksgiving Break**

12.01: Sandel: 'The Case Against Perfection'; Bailey: 'For Enhancing People'.

12.03: Bostrom: 'Why I want to be Posthuman'; Stock: 'The Battle for the Future'.

### **6. Achieving A Worthy Future**

12.08: Singer: 'Famine, Affluence and Morality'; *The Most Good You Can Do* (Chs. 3 and 6).

12.10: Broome: *Climate Matters*; Jamieson: *Reason in a Dark Time* (Ch. 6) **Fourth Paper Due**

12.17: **Final Exam**: 10:30am - 12:30pm (in class)