

Course Information

“Like all great stories, the best science fiction, at its heart, is about people. We identify the genre based on its exploration of current and future technologies, systems, and situations, but what those technologies, systems, and situations really do is show us to ourselves. When we look at ourselves in unfamiliar situations, interacting with unfamiliar environments, like in science fiction, we gain a new understanding of ourselves. And that’s amazing.” – Andrea Kovarcsik

Description

“For philosophy is merely the attempt to answer such ultimate questions, not carelessly and dogmatically, as we do in ordinary life and even in the sciences, but critically after exploring all that makes such questions puzzling, and after realizing all the vagueness and confusion that underlie our ordinary ideas.” – Bertrand Russell

Everyone is a philosopher. As Russell said, philosophy is a discipline of questions, and many of the most important questions in the history of philosophy are probably some of the same questions you have asked yourself. Where do we come from? What is the nature of the universe? Can I really know anything about it? What is knowledge? Who am I? How should I live? In this course, we will encounter various answers to these questions, and look at the philosophers who have historically made these arguments.

But why science fiction? Actually, as you will see, science fiction is particularly well suited to philosophical inquiry. Much philosophical inquiry is aided by the use of *thought experiments*, and the practice of considering interesting possibilities that aren’t yet a scientific reality has a long and distinguished tradition in philosophy.

The course will impart some knowledge of the history and methods of philosophy, but the real point is to get you asking important questions, reasoning clearly and capably, and sharpening your critical thinking skills—developing abilities, in other words, that will make a difference in your life long after specific content details have faded from memory.

Contact Information, etc.

Professor Mara Harrell

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mharrell@ucsd.edu

Student Walk-in Hours

Tuesdays 1:00-2:00; Wednesdays 3:00-4:00

A&H 0464

Or by Zoom: <https://ucsd.zoom.us/j/93350171982>

Course communication: All course announcements will be posted on Canvas. If you need to contact me, then you must use your UCSD email address and include ‘PHIL 16’ in the subject line. Replies can be expected within 24-48 hours. Please note that grade disputes will be discussed and resolved in-person (or via Zoom) only, not via email.

Student Walk-in Hours

If you cannot make it to the scheduled walk-in hours, please contact me to make an appointment. Also, whenever I am in my office with the door open, you are welcome to stop in.

I encourage you to use the student walk-in hours as an opportunity to clarify points you don’t understand, to get additional readings, to talk about the subject matter in relation to your own interests, to go over work in progress, or to address problems you may be having in the course.

Visit early and often. Email is the most reliable way to contact me.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Distinguish between several kinds of philosophical questions
- Describe the role of thought experiments in philosophical inquiry
- Identify and analyze philosophical questions and ideas in a work of science fiction
- Evaluate evidence for and against various philosophical positions using thought experiments

Texts

All required & recommended readings for this course will be available on the Canvas site for this course. ALWAYS bring the materials that were assigned for that day's class, to that day's class!

What else do I need for class?

- A copy of the required course text
- A good Internet connection
- A tablet/computer for access to Canvas, email, and web sites
- Something to write on and write with during class

Assignments

There will be 6 types of assignments in this class: the syllabus quiz, the office visit, reading quizzes, discussion questions, in-class activities, and a final project. Research about learning strongly suggests¹ that the most important factor in learning is **doing the work** of reading, writing, recalling, practicing, synthesizing, and analyzing. The assignments are designed to help with that. The specific requirements for each assignment will be given separately. There will be 10 reading quizzes, 10 discussion questions, and 17 in-class activities over the course of the quarter.

Grading

The assignments in this course will not be graded in the traditional fashion. Instead, they will all be graded on a "satisfactory/unsatisfactory" basis. The system is called "**specifications grading**." An assignment is "satisfactory" if it has met all the specifications for that assignment. The specifications for each assignment will be described in more detail in the Assignments folder on the Canvas site for this course.

Your final grade in this course will then be determined by how many of the assignments you have completed satisfactorily (see below). This means that you can choose what grade you would like to earn in this course and aim toward that grade as it will depend on the successful completion of various assignments. There will be rubrics available so you can see how each assignment is graded.

What counts as "satisfactory" for each assignment?

Syllabus Quiz: Answering at least 80% of the questions correctly earns a grade of "satisfactory" for that quiz. In Canvas, the quiz will be set up so that you automatically get 3 tries to get at least 80%.

Office Visit: Do this by Friday, 1/27. sign up for a 10-minute appointment with me for a brief, "get-acquainted" conversation, either in person or by Zoom. When you sign up, please let me know *how* you want to meet. (Note: the appointment slots are for up to 4 students at a time. If you'd like to talk with me by yourself without others, then we can make a separate appointment to do that afterwards.) You earn a grade of "satisfactory" on this assignment only by making an appointment, showing up for it, and telling me a bit about yourself as a learner and your hopes for this course, by the deadline.

Reading Quizzes: Answering at least 80% of the questions correctly on a quiz earns a grade of "satisfactory" for that quiz. In Canvas, the quizzes will be set up so that you automatically get 3 tries to get at least 80%.

Discussion Questions: A list of several specifications that the assignment must meet will be given in the instructions the assignment. Earning a grade of "satisfactory" means that the assignment has met *all* of the specifications.

In-class Activities: These are small-group or individual activities and/or writing that you'll complete during class time, for us to discuss during class. I will assess them as either "satisfactory" (you did them and, if relevant, turned them in) or "unsatisfactory" (you weren't in class, you didn't do them, or you did them very weakly).

Final Project: A list of several specifications that the assignment must meet will be given in the instructions the assignment. Earning a grade of "satisfactory" means that the assignment has met *all* of the specifications.

What happens if what I turn in doesn't earn a grade of "satisfactory"?

The point of having a grading system like this is to make the student's final grade in the course actually indicate the level of mastery of the material the student achieved. In traditional points-based grading, a student can consistently produce sub-standard work and still pass the class, in which case the passing grade does not reflect the

¹ There are many good books that summarize research on how people learn. These include *Make it Stick: The Science of Successful Learning* by Peter Brown, Henry Roediger, and Mark McDaniel; *Small Teaching* by James Lang; and *Understanding How We Learn* by Yana Weinstein, Megan Sumaracki, and Oliver Caviglioli.

fact that the student may not have actually mastered *any* of the material at all.

So, what to do? The answer is to give the students ways not only to master the content, but also to demonstrate that mastery. So, for any assignment that is deemed unsatisfactory, the student can **revise and resubmit** it within 48 hours of the notification of the grade. On the other hand, the student should have incentives to turn in their best work on the first try. Thus, the opportunities the student has to revise and resubmit is limited to Reading Quizzes, Discussion Questions, and the Final Project, and only if the original submission is submitted on time.

How do I revise and resubmit an assignment?

Revising and resubmitting an assignment requires (1) revising the assignment based on my feedback given and (2) a reflection (a short description of how you used the formative feedback you received to improve your revision).

Will late assignments be accepted?

For the Reading Quizzes, Discussion Questions, and the Final Project only there is a 48-hour grace period to submit the assignment. This means that, for any of these assignments, you can submit up to 2 days after the stated deadline and still have the assignment graded. However, the only assignments a student can revise and resubmit (in the case of earning an “unsatisfactory” grade) are those which the student has submitted **BEFORE** the stated deadline. This means that if you submit your assignment during the grace period, you will **NOT** be able to revise and resubmit if the assignment earns a grade of “unsatisfactory.” Additionally, any assignments submitted after the grace period are automatically “unsatisfactory.”

So, what do I have to do to get an A (or B or C) in this class?

Each assignment has its own set of criteria of adequacy, included with the assignment description. The earned grade of “satisfactory” required for each final letter grade:

	A	B	C	D
1. <i>Insultingly Easy Syllabus Quiz</i>	1/1	1/1	1/1	1/1
2. <i>Office Visit (in-person or remote)</i>	1/1	1/1	1/1	1/1
3. <i>Reading Quizzes</i>	9/10	8/10	7/10	6/10
4. <i>Discussion Questions</i>	9/10	8/10	7/10	6/10
5. <i>In-class Activities</i>	14/17	12/17	10/17	8/17
6. <i>Final project</i>	1/1	1/1	1/1	1/1

For a course grade of “F”, just do less than what’s required for a course grade of “D.”

Can I only get A, B, C, D, or F? No plusses or minuses?

Actually, you can earn a + or - attached to your base grade in the following situations:

You will receive a ‘+’ on the letter grade if you earn a grade of “satisfactory” on at least one of 3, 4, or 5 with the percentage that corresponds to a higher grade. You will receive a ‘-’ on the letter grade if you earn a grade of “satisfactory” on at one of 3, 4, or 5 with the percentage that corresponds to a lower grade.

- Example: Earn a grade of “satisfactory” on the syllabus quiz, the office visit, the final project, 9 out of 10 reading quizzes, 9 out of 10 discussion questions, and 14 out of 17 in-class assignments ⇒ **Earn an A**
- Example: Earn a grade of “satisfactory” on the syllabus quiz, the office visit, the final project, 7 out of 10 reading quizzes, 7 out of 10 discussion questions, and 12 out of 17 in-class assignments ⇒ **Earn a C+**
- Example: Earn a grade of “satisfactory” on the syllabus quiz, the office visit, the final project, 8 out of 10 reading quizzes, 8 out of 10 discussion questions, and 10 out of 17 in-class assignments ⇒ **Earn a B-**

Note: An A and an A+ are both a 4.0 in your GPA calculation, however, if you exceed all of the requirements to earn an “A” in the class, then your course grade will be “A+”.

How can I keep track of my grade in this course?

Find the grade listed above, for which you met all of the listed requirements. That will be your course grade! You can track your progress by determining what percentage of the reading quizzes, the discussion questions, and the in-class activities you have completed.

IMPORTANT! Please note that although Canvas will display the grades that you have earned on each assignment, the score in the “Total” column in the gradebook has no meaning and does **NOT** correspond to your grade the class.

Attendance

Attendance is somewhat required—you need to be in class in order to earn a grade of “satisfactory” on the in-class activities, which means that to earn an “A” you can only miss 3 class periods over the course of the quarter. Besides being able to do the in-class exercises, there are many reasons to come to class. First, the reading is either science fiction stories or philosophical articles. Only in class will we make the connections between the philosophy and the science fiction. Additionally, you can’t have your questions answered while you are reading the text or watching a video. In class, you can have your questions answered in real time, and I can offer several alternative explanations if one isn’t sufficient. And finally, both the verbal and non-verbal feedback I get from students in class helps me determine whether I am going too fast, or students are confused.

FAQ

How much time will I need to devote to this course?

Phil 16 is a 4-unit course, and it will meet for approximately 3 instructional hours per week for 10 weeks. The general guideline for such a course is that you spend 3 hours on course-related work outside of class for every 1 hour you spend in class. That’s an expected average, not a requirement. However, the course materials (and assignments) might require more time than you expect, so “budgeting” about 9 hours per week to this course should give you plenty of time.

What should I do during our class meetings?

1. You should arrive at class sessions on time, stay for the required components of each class session, and constructively participate in all class activities.
2. During the class meetings, you should be focused on class, doing your best to avoid doing or interacting with things that will distract you, your classmates, or me.
3. **DO NOT** make any audio or visual recordings of any part of the class session, unless you and I have specifically discussed doing so as one of your documented accommodations for ADA purposes. Doing otherwise undermines the ability to maintain your classmates’ trust, violates your classmates’ legitimate privacy expectations, and could lead to their feeling (or even being) unsafe. Unless your classmates and I have explicitly said otherwise, you **DO NOT** have permission to take a photo or screen capture, livestream a small-group discussion, or record any part of a class meeting.
4. You should treat everyone in the class with at least as much patience, respect, kindness, and consideration as you expect from the rest of us.

The listed items above apply to all of our class meetings, whether in-person or online. These are not the only expectations, but they are some of the most important ones for helping to foster and maintain a culture of respect and engagement.

What will we usually do in class?

On an average class day, you will come to class having already read/watched/heard the assigned materials for that day’s class. We’ll spend time focusing on questions and activities designed to help you understand that material more accurately and deeply, and to generate new answers and new questions. After class, you will be reading/watching for the next class meeting; talking with your classmates; talking with me; and working on your course assignments.

This class will encourage and require active participation from all students. Various well-designed studies – plus our own life experiences – show that most of us promptly forget most of what we read or hear, unless we can apply the material very soon after we read or hear it. (Our brains are efficient: why would they remember something they can’t use?) Our class activities and assignments are designed to help you use the ideas you encounter.

Late Assignments and Requests for Extensions

Assignments submitted after the 48-hour grace period will be marked “unsatisfactory” unless a request for an additional extension has been arranged ahead of the deadline. Requests for extensions need to be accompanied by relevant documentation, and will be denied after the deadline for the assignment has passed.

Cell Phones, Laptops, and Other Related Technologies

How students interact with portable technology devices can very much harm the dynamics of the classroom. Studies have shown that it is not only students that use these devices who suffer, but also the students around them.

Therefore, I expect you to **turn off your cell phone** before coming to class. There is to be no text messaging, checking email or otherwise “playing” with electronics during class.

Religious Observance

If you have a conflict between a religious holiday and a graded assignment, please contact one of us in advance so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Accommodation for Disability

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) which is in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Students are required to present their AFA letters to Faculty (please arrange to contact me privately) and to the OSD Liaison in the department in advance so that accommodations may be arranged. Contact the OSD for further information: 858.534.4382 (phone), osd@ucsd.edu (email), disabilities.ucsd.edu (web)

Academic Integrity

Integrity of scholarship is essential for an academic community. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor this principle and in so doing protect the validity of intellectual work. For students, this means that all academic work will be done by the individual to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. More information about UCSD’s policy on academic integrity is available at <http://senate.ucsd.edu/Operating-Procedures/Senate-Manual/appendices/2>

The representation of other people’s ideas as though they were your own is plagiarism, and a violation of academic integrity. I have an absolutely zero tolerance policy about plagiarism. Plagiarism is not restricted to verbatim copying of other people’s words. Basically, you should cite anything that (a) you got from someone else; and (b) a reasonable person would not know ahead of time. For proper citation, you should cite any ideas and quotes that are due to other people. (Your choice about citation format, but please be consistent.)

I realize that the vast majority of you will never consider cheating. However, a few of you may (for a variety of reasons) be tempted to plagiarize others’ work. **Do not take chances with plagiarism:** if you are uncertain whether you are doing something unacceptable, please just ask. I am happy to answer questions about whether something constitutes plagiarism. And if you are ever tempted to present someone else’s ideas as your own, then please come talk to me so that we can address the underlying challenges that are pushing you to that point.

Health and Well-being

Take care of yourself. Do your best to maintain a healthy lifestyle this quarter by eating well, exercising, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep, and taking some time to relax. This will help you achieve your goals and cope with stress.

All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. There are many helpful resources available on campus and an important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is almost always helpful.

If you or anyone you know experiences any academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings like anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support. If there are issues related to coursework that are a source of particular stress or challenge, please speak with me, so that I am able to support you. UC San Diego provides several resources to all enrolled students, including:

- Counseling and Psychological Services (858-534-3755 | caps.ucsd.edu)
- Student Health Services (858-534-3300 | studenthealth.ucsd.edu)
- CARE at the Sexual Assault Resource Center (858-534-5793 | care.ucsd.edu)
- The Hub Basic Needs Center (858-246-2632 | basicneeds.ucsd.edu)

Course Schedule

All readings are available in the Canvas site for this course. An * marks optional readings/viewings.

Week		Topic	Read Before Class	Assignment Due
1	M 1/9	What is Philosophy?		
1	W 1/11	Thought Experiments & Philosophy	Bradbury, "Dancing So as Not to Be Dead" Title: Introduction to <i>What If...</i> Daly: "Thought Experiment"	
2	M 1/16	MLK Day – No Class		
2	W 1/18	What kind of society is best?	Alcott: "Transcendental Wild Oats" Miller: Political Philosophy, Ch1	
3	M 1/23	What kind of society is best?	Dick: "Minority Report" Kowalski: "Minority Report, Molinism, and the Viability of Precrime" * <i>Minority Report</i> (Movie)	Syllabus Quiz
3	W 1/25	What kind of society is best?	Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" * <i>Strange New Worlds</i> (Episode 1.6)	
4	M 1/30	Who am I?	Perry: <i>A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality</i>	
4	W 2/1	Who am I?	Olson: "Was I Ever a Fetus?" Egan: "Learning to Be Me" * <i>Dark City</i> (Movie)	
5	M 2/6	Who am I?	Parfit: "What We Believe Ourselves to Be" Richards: "Be Right Back and Rejecting Tragedy" Star Trek TNG (Episode 6.24) "Second Chances" * <i>Black Mirror</i> (Episode 2.1) "Be Right Back"	
5	W 2/8	What am I?	Descartes: Meditations 1, 2 & 4 Bisson: "They're Made Out of Meat" * <i>Star Trek TNG</i> (Episode 2.9) "Measure of a Man"	
6	M 2/13	What am I?	Turing Test* <i>Ex Machina</i> (Movie); <i>Blade Runner</i> (Movie)	
6	W 2/15	What am I?	Watch: PostHuman: An Introduction to Transhumanism Fukuyama: Transhumanism * <i>Killjoys</i> (Episode 3.1) "Boondoggie"	
7	M 2/20	President's Day – No Class		
7	W 2/22	What can I know?	Re-read Descartes: Meditation 1 Star Trek TOS: The Menagerie * <i>The Matrix</i> (Movie)	
8	M 2/27	What can I know?	Isaac Asimov: "Blind Alley"	
8	W 3/1	What can I know?	Fred Saberhagen: <i>Berserker</i> series, esp. "Without a Thought", "Inhuman Error" (actually anticipates Searle's Chinese Room)	

			Leiber, "How to Build a Person"	
9	M 3/6	What can I know?	Starship Troopers; The Thing (2011)	
9	W 3/8	Could we travel through time?	Heinlein: "—All you zombies—" Lewis: "The Paradoxes of Time Travel" *12 Monkeys (Movie), Back to the Future (Movie)	
10	M 3/13	Could we travel through time?	Doctor Who	
10	W 3/15	Wrap Up		
	? 3/?			

Further Reading/Watching

What kind of society is best?

Who am I?

What am I?

What can I know?

Could we travel through time?

Other Philosophical Topics

Do I have free will?

What should I do?

Gender & Sexuality

Climate Change

Language