

Political Science Fiction: Political Ideas in Film and Fiction SYLLABUS

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Course description and course objectives:

The title of the course “Political science fiction” is a wordplay: it means merging political science with fiction, or politics with science fiction. Science fiction provides the story or us, not predominantly or necessarily about outer space or distant future. Hence, science fiction can be seen as an allegory of ourselves and the opportunity to explore our political practices and society. The advantage of studying fiction along with social sciences, especially with politics, is the fact that fiction raises new ideas about politics that cannot be found in the mainstream social science literature. The creativity of thought found in science fiction thus helps us thinking about major political-philosophical problems we are always confronted with. The aim of this course is to examine some of the major topics in political science through the vehicle of (science) fiction narratives. We will provide these narratives with political aura giving them theoretical underpinnings. From its beginnings it is believed that science fiction represents a rich subtext for our historical and current political struggles. It deals with central political and social issues regarding our views on life in general and communal life with others, on threats to our way of life, on crossing the boundaries of traditions and existing social practices, on our enemies and human nature, on political and ethical disputes, ideal institutions, or utopian and dystopian political communities and organizations. Thus, science fiction contributes toward better understanding of political life. It is a divergent way of approaching to the grand themes of political science and social life in general. By merging politics and science fiction together this course will add to the traditional cannon of courses in political science, hence providing with the opportunity for learning about politics from the perspective of science fiction as an important part of our popular culture. Since science fiction provides a commentary on social and political evolution, it necessary resonates with current or potential problems and debates of this world. Sometimes science fiction is a product of both trans-epochal and current social problems and concerns. But our political ideals may be influenced by some idealized fictional views of the future. Hence, this course is designed to enliven a greater understanding of the seriousness of such views and debates by demanding from students to challenge their view on the genre, namely to see beyond the entertaining dimension of science fiction, but rather into its political and social potential for critique of our societies, institutions, dangers and development. As such, it is a course about politics and political thought, not (science) fiction as such. Since the relevance of political-philosophical arguments in fiction should not be explored exclusively in the genre of sci-fi media, the course is a platform to explore the politics through film in general. In doing so, we will focus on different sources – from the political-philosophical texts to those that explore the matter in question through the lenses of international relations, comparative politics and public policy – asking from the students the ability to think in different directions, or, as it is said at the beginning of the *Star Trek* series, “to boldly go where no man has gone before”.

Course enrolment requirements and entry competences required for the course:

None, except the interest for the subject matter. The course is open for all freshmen and sophomore (first and second) year students interested in political interpretation of science fiction. Of course, basic knowledge of English language is necessary since the lectures and literature are in English.

Student responsibilities:

Students are obliged to attend at least 50% lectures and seminars to get the pass signature at the end of the semester. Students need to pass the midterm in order to take the final exam. Both, the midterm and the final consist of the theoretical (understanding of the reading material) and practical (an interpretation, analysis, or an application of the previously watched and read content) parts or questions that students would have to address. They are intended to be in-class exams, although some parts of these exams might be developed at home. Class presentations will be required. Students will present on a selected movie and readings. You will be assigned to the groups of two or four per presentation so the others may rely on you and benefit from your covering of the material for a chosen session. This means that every group will be responsible for covering at least one session during the semester. After these presentations, the rest of you will be responsible for the questions and discussion. Since we will be merging theoretical/philosophical arguments, political ideas and fictional movies, the whole course, both lectures and seminars, is intended to be a food for thought for understanding our political predicament through an interpretation and discussion of course materials.

Grading and evaluating student work in class and at the final exam:

33% class presentations & discussion

33% midterm

33% final

Grading policy. 5 (A) = excellent work (91-100%), 4 (B) = very good but not yet excellent work (81-90), 3 (C) = standard good work (70-80), 2 (D) = adequate work (60-69), and 1 (F/Fail) = completely inadequate, fail (0-59)

Important points to note:

Classroom etiquette: ALL CELL PHONES must be OFF during class sessions. Please come to class on time and stay for the entire class, unless you have an emergency.

Student Ethics: A significant component of the class requires students to treat with respect their classmates, not allowing themselves to interrupt someone's arguments, or being indecent in any way.

Plagiarism: Check the Faculty's web page for the policy toward plagiarism.

Services to students with disabilities or with some emergency personal problems: If you have any concerns about the course or about completing the work for the class, *let me know* in advance. If you have an emergency that obstructs or may obstruct your performance during the semester try to contact me as soon as possible and provide me with a proof of the nature of your emergency.

Course content : Lectures & Seminars

1. Introduction

2. Science fiction and Political-Philosophical Ideas: defining and interpreting the genre

J.P. Tellote, *Science Fiction Film*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 3-60

Todd McGowan, *Hegel and the Impossibility of the Future in Science Fiction Cinema*, pp. 16-35 (<http://www.film-philosophy.com/2009v13n1/mcgowan.pdf>)

Optional: *Moon* (2009)

Seminar:

Damian Cox & Michael Levine, *Thinking Through Film: Doing Philosophy, Watching Movies*, Blackwell, 2012, pp. 3-11

Aaron Smuts, *Film as Philosophy: In Defense of a Bold Thesis*, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (Fall, 2009), pp. 409-419

Keith M. Johnson, *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction*, pp. 7-25

3. Political and social visions in science fiction: Utopia vs. Dystopia (I)

Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1979, ch. 3 & 4 (pp. 37-84)

Seminar: Class-division and class-struggle in a dystopian setting

Metropolis: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1kxfiY_1DA

Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis*, British Film Institute Publishing, 2000, pp. 9-17, 42-69.

Jarold J. Abrams, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment in Metropolis*, in: Steven Sanders, *The Philosophy of Science Fiction Film*, The University Press of Kentucky, pp. 153-169

Marx, *Estranged Labor*, in: *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Prometheus Books, 1988, pp. 69-84

4. Political and social visions in science fiction: Utopia vs. Dystopia (II)

Things to Come: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atwfWEKz00U>

Kant, *An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'*, in: *Political Writings*, pp. 54-60. or Jonathan Israel, *Progress and the Enlightenment's Two Conflicting Ways of Improving the World* (selected pages)

Bertell Ollman, *The Utopian Vision of the Future (Then and Now): A Marxist Critique* (<http://monthlyreview.org/2005/07/01/the-utopian-vision-of-the-future-then-and-now-a-marxist-critique/>)

Seminar: Class-division and class-struggle in a dystopian setting (Part 2)

The Time Machine

Harry M. Geduld, *The Definitive Time Machine*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1987, pp. 1-24

Leon Stover, *The Time Machine: An Invention*, McFarland & Company, 1996, pp. 1-17

5. Political and social visions in science fiction: Technofobia

Sean Redmond, *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader*, Wallflower Press, 2005, pp. 38-73

Seminar: Technology as a Threat to Humanity?

Matrix

Kevin Warwick, *The Matrix - Our Future?*, in: Christopher Grau, *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*, pp. 198-207

Julia Driver, *Artificial Ethics*, in: Christopher Grau, *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*, pp. 208-217

John Patridge, *Plato's Cave and the Matrix*, in: Christopher Grau, *Philosophers Explore the Matrix*, pp. 239-256

Optional: "Ontology and *The Matrix*", in: Damian Cox & Michael Levine, *Thinking Through Film: Doing Philosophy, Watching Movies*, Blackwell, 2012, pp. 65-75

6. Political and social visions in science fiction: What is to be Human?

Planet of the Apes (1968)

Optional but recommended films: *Planet of the Apes* (2001), *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011), *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014)

Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men (Part I)*

Seminar:

Blade Runner

Deborah Knight and George McKnight, *What is to be Human?*, in: Steven Sanders, *The Philosophy of Science Fiction Film*, The University Press of Kentucky, pp. 21-36

Douglas Williams, *Ideology as Dystopia: An Interpretation of Blade Runner*, *International Political Science Review* (1988), Vol. 9, No. 4, 381-394

7. Midterm (Apr 17th)

8. World Politics: Hegemony and Political Ideas in a Global Setting

Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country

Star Trek: First Contact

Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Harvard University Press, preface & ch. 1.1. World Order (pp. 3-21)

Jean Baudrillard, *The Agony of Power*, Semiotext(e), 2010, pp. 33-35, 45-56

Eberl & Decker, *Star Trek and Philosophy*, ch. 7 & 10.

Optional: Steven Yates, *Star Trek and Collectivism: The Case of the Borg*
<http://fee.org/freeman/detail/star-trek-and-collectivism-the-case-of-the-borg>

Seminar: "We are at war!" : The State and the Two Faces of Security

Battlestar Galactica: Mini Series (parts 1 & 2), "33" (S01E01), "Kobol's Last Gleaming", part 2 (S01E13)

Nicholas J. Kiersey: "'The future of humanity begins with a choice': Narrating techno-rational subsumption and micropolitics in International Relations and *Battlestar Galactica*", in: *Battlestar Galactica and International Relations*, pp. 57-74

Charles Tilly, *War Making and State Making as Organized Crime*, in: *Bringing the State Back In*, pp. 169-185

C. Carpenter, H. Cvijanovic, W. Mason: "Security or human security: Civil-military relations in *Battlestar Galactica*", in: *Battlestar Galactica and International Relations*, pp. 137-163.

9. Violence and the State

Battlestar Galactica: "Pegasus" (S02E10), "Resurrection ship (part2)" (S02E12) "Epiphanies" (S02E13), Battlestar Galactica - Razor (movie)

Sara Livingston, "The Razor's Edge: *Galactica*, *Pegasus*, and Lakoff", in: *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy* ed. Josef Steiff and Tristan D. Tamplin, pp. 143-153

Amy Kind, *You Can't Rape a Machine*, in: *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy* ed. Josef Steiff and Tristan D. Tamplin, pp. 117-128

Carl Schmitt: *The Concept of the Political*, The University of Chicago Press, 1996, sections 1-6, pp. 19-58

Seminar: "We are not a civilization anymore..." : State of Exception

Battlestar Galactica: "Bastille Day" (S01E03), "Flash and Bone" (S01E08), "Crossroads" part 2 (S03E20)

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp. 1-20., *State of Exception*, pp. 1-23.

10. Emancipation, Resistance and Civil Disobedience

Cloud Atlas

Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience* (any edition, the text is approx. 16 pages long)

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, in: *Untimely Meditations*, pp. 127-130.

Michel Foucault, *The Subject and Power*, *Critical Inquiry*, vol.8, no.4, 1982, pp. 777-795.

Martin Luther King, *The Ethical Demands for Integration*, in: *A Testament for Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Harper, San Francisco, pp.

117-122 (first half of the page)

Seminar: "There's no boundaries for us" - Resistance and Order in BSG

Battlestar Galactica: "Occupation" (S03E01), "Exodus I" (S03E03), "Exodus II" (S03E04), "Collaborators" (S03E05)

Andrew Terjesen, *Resistance vs. Collaboration on New Caprica: What Would You Do?*, pp. 114-125

Terry Eagleton, *Saints and Suicides*, in: *Holly Terror*, ch. 4 (pp. 89-114)

Optional: Spencer Ackerman, *Battlestar: Iraqtica*

http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/culturebox/2006/10/battlestar_iraqtica.html

11. Cruelty and the "other"

Distinct 9

Richard Rorty, *The Last intellectual in Europe: Orwell on Cruelty*, in: *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 169-189

Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society*, pp. 1-27

David Livingston Smith, *Dehumanization, Essentialism, and Moral Psychology*, *Philosophy Compass* 9/11 (2014), pp. 814–824

Seminar: Star Wars (presentations)

12. (Post-democratic) New World Order and its Discontents

Batman: The Dark Knight

Sheldon Wolin, *Inverted Totalitarianism*, pp. 211-237, in: *Democracy Inc.*, Princeton University Press

Richard Rorty, *Post-democracy* (upload)

Optional: Mark Danner, *In the Darkness of Dick Cheney*, *The New York Review of Books* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/mar/06/darkness-dick-cheney/>

"*The Dark Knight: Batman on Deontology and Consequentialism*", in: Damian Cox & Michael Levine, *Thinking Through Film: Doing Philosophy, Watching Movies*, Blackwell, 2012, pp. 228-241

Seminar:

Batman: The Dark Knight Rises

Slavoj Žižek, *The Politics of Batman*, *New Statesman*

<http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/culture/2012/08/slavoj-%C5%BEi%C5%BEek-politics-batman>

Slavoj Žižek, *Dictatorship of the Proletariat in Gotham City*

<http://blogdaboitempo.com.br/2012/08/08/dictatorship-of-the-proletariat-in-gotham-city-slavoj-zizek-on-the-dark-knight-rises/>

Tyler O'Neil, *Dark Knight and Occupy Wall Street: The Humble Rise*

<http://hillsdalenaturallawreview.com/2012/07/21/dark-knight-and-occupy-wall-street-the-humble-rise/>



13. FINAL EXAM... so