

<b>Course Title</b>	: Science Fiction in Literature and Visual Arts
<b>Course Code</b>	: CLB9029
<b>Recommended Study Year</b>	: Any
<b>No. of Credits/Term</b>	: 3
<b>Mode of Tuition</b>	: Sectional approach
<b>Class Contact Hours</b>	: 3 hours per week
<b>Category in Core Curriculum</b>	: Humanities and the Arts Cluster (CLB Cluster)
<b>Discipline</b>	: -
<b>Prerequisite(s)</b>	: Nil
<b>Co-requisite(s)</b>	: Nil
<b>Exclusion(s)</b>	: Nil
<b>Exemption Requirement(s)</b>	: Nil

### **Brief Course Description**

This course is intended to introduce students to some of the major works and themes in science-fiction (SF) literature and visual arts. The course will discuss contemporary and classic SF authors and provide historical and theoretical background to understand their works. SF has been highly influential in popular culture also because of the breadth of topics and ideas explored. For example, SF works may deal with: hypothetical utopian or dystopian scenarios (G. Orwell's *1984*, P.K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*), artificial intelligence and the interaction between humans and machines (I. Asimov's *I, Robot*, A. Garland's *Ex Machina*), personal identity and memory alterations (G. Egan's story 'Learning to be me', R. Scott's *Blade Runner*), time and time-travel (K. Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*), interaction with alien races (Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem*, T. Chiang's *Story of Your Life*), space exploration (S. Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, S. Lem's *Solaris*), and many others. The course will provide the students with a selection of starting points in this vast genre and the intellectual resources required to understand and appreciate these works. Particular emphasis will be put on the philosophical problems and dilemmas explored in the selected texts, movies, or TV series episodes.

### **Aims**

The course aims to:

- Introduce the students to some classic and contemporary works in the SF genre;
- Enable students to draw connections between selected SF works and their philosophical presuppositions or dilemmas that these works are intended to explore;
- Present various theories of (i) what constitutes the genre of SF and (ii) the artistic appreciation of the works discussed in class;
- Provide students with the intellectual resources to develop their own views on the value of SF.

### **Learning Outcomes**

On completion of the course, students will be able to:

- (LO1) Describe and discuss some classic and contemporary works in the SF genre.
- (LO2) Specify the connections between SF works and the relevant philosophical themes in them.
- (LO3) Illustrate some theoretical aspects of the appreciation of works of SF.
- (LO4) Propose and discuss their personal views on the value of SF (in particular, of the value of those works discussed in class).

### **Indicative Content**

1. Aesthetic Appreciation and Genre
2. Sci-fi and Ethics, or Exploring Moral Dilemmas in/through Fiction

3. Human Beings, Persons, and Sci-fi
4. Future Dystopias and Alternate Histories
5. Encountering Alien Races in Sci-fi
6. Technological Singularity and AI
7. Sci-fi, Virtual Reality, and Scepticism
8. Body and Mind Alterations
9. Space Exploration

### **Teaching Method**

Lectures and discussions

### **Measurement of Learning Outcomes**

Students will take/write:

- An outline of a SF short story or a short paper (1000 words) on a theme of the course (to assess LO2 and LO4);
- A final exam, in which they will have to write long essay questions on the content of the course. Students will have to elaborate their views on the theories and works discussed in class (to assess LO1, LO2, LO3, and LO4);
- A term paper (1500-2000 words) on a topic of the course (to assess mainly LO4). The students will be provided with a list of readings related to the specific topic they choose to write about.

In addition, students are expected to participate in classroom discussions and demonstrate good preparation—for instance, they will have to demonstrate adequate knowledge of the required weekly readings when called by the lecturer (to assess LO1, LO2, LO3, and LO4).

### **Assessment**

Participation and in-class discussion (10%)

SF short story outline/short paper (20%)

Paper (30%)

Final exam (40%)

### **Required Readings**

A final list of readings and movies will be available on moodle and will depend on the individual instructor of the course.

*Selections from:*

*General works on SF and its appreciation*

Bould, Mark *et alia* (eds.): *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, London & New York: Routledge, 2009.

Evnine, Simon: “‘But Is It Science Fiction?’: Science Fiction and a Theory of Genre”, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 39 (1), 2015.

Livingston, Paisley: ‘Skepticism, Realism, Fallibilism: On Lem’s Epistemological Themes’, in *The Art and Science of Stanislaw Lem*, 2006: 117–29.

Livingston, Paisley: ‘On the Appreciation of Cinematic Adaptations’, *Projections*, 4 (2), 2010.

Schneider, Susan (ed.): *Science Fiction and Philosophy*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Smuts, Aaron: ‘Popular Art’, in *The Continuum Companion to Aesthetics*, Continuum, 2012.

Suvin, Darko: *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Peter Lang, 1979/2016.

Walton, Kendall: ‘Categories of Art’, *Philosophical Review*, 79, 1970: 334–67.

*Representative list of sci-fi works (any edition)\**

Asimov, Isaac: *I, Robot* & other short stories  
Bradbury, Ray: *Fahrenheit 451* & other short stories  
Burgess, Anthony: *A Clockwork Orange*  
Dick, Philip: *Ubik* & other short stories  
Delany, S: *Aye, and Gomorrah* & other short stories  
Chiang, Ted: *Arrival* & other short stories  
Clarke, Arthur C: *The Sentinel* & other short stories  
Egan, Greg: *Axiomatic* & other short stories  
Ellison, Harlan (ed.): *Dangerous Visions*  
Foster, EM: *The Machine stops*  
Gibson, William: *Burning Chrome* & other short stories  
Heinlein, Robert: *All You Zombies* & other short stories  
Huxley, Aldous: *Brave New World*  
Ishiguro, Tatsuaki: *Biogenesis* & other stories  
Keys, D: *Flowers for Algernon* & other short stories  
Komatsu, Sakyō: *Japan Sinks*  
Le Guin, Ursula: *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas* & other short stories  
Lem, Stanislaw: *The Cyberiad* & other short stories  
Lovecraft, H.P.: *The Shadow Out of Time* & other short stories  
Mieville, China: *Three Moments of an Explosion* & other stories  
Shelley, Mary: *Frankenstein*  
Orwell, George: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*  
Poe, Edgar Allan: *Mesmeric Revelations* & other short stories  
Stevenson, Robert L: *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*  
Vonnegut, Kurt: *Slaughterhouse-Five* & other short stories  
Wells, HG: *The Empire of the Ants* & other short stories  
Zamyatin, Yevgeny: *We*

\*Other authors and their works may be included in the final list of readings

*Philosophical discussions of related topics\**

Block, Ned: The Mind as the Software of the Brain. In Schneider (2009).  
Bostrom, Nick & M. Cirkovic: *Global Catastrophic Risks*, OUP: 2008  
Dennett, Daniel: Where Am I? In Schneider (2009)  
Chalmers, David: The Matrix as Metaphysics. In Schneider (2009)  
Chalmers, David: Uploading: A Philosophical Analysis. In R. Blackford & D. Broderick (eds.) *Intelligence Unbound*. Blackwell: 2014.  
Frankish, Keith & W. R. Ramsey: *The Cambridge Companion to Artificial Intelligence*, Cambridge UP: 2014.  
Harris, John: *Enhancing Evolution*, Princeton UP: 2007.  
Huemer, Michael: Free Will and Determinism in the World of Minority Report. In Schneider (2009).  
Kane, Robert: *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, OUP: 2005.  
Lewid, David: The Paradoxes of Time Travel. In Schneider (2009)  
McMahan, Jeff: The Ethics of Killing in War. *Ethics*, 114 (2004): 693–733.  
Olson, Eric: Personal Identity. In Schneider (2009)

Nozick, Robert: *Anarchy, State, Utopia*. Basic Books, 1974.  
Parfit, Derek: *Reasons and Persons*, Clarendon Press: 1984/87.  
Searle, John: Minds, Brains, and Programs. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 3 (1980): 417–57.  
Sider, Ted: Time. In Schneider (2009)

\*Other authors and their works may be included in the final list of readings

Additional material (papers, lecture notes, etc.) will be available on moodle.

### **Important Notes**

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>