

# RELIGION AND SCIENCE FICTION

Professor Jodi Eichler-Levine and Professor Khurram Hussain

## Contacts

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## Office Hours

Prof. Eichler-Levine's Office  
Hours: Tuesdays 2-4 pm *and*  
*by appointment*

Prof. Hussain's Office Hours: *by*  
*appointment*

## Course Meets

Tues/Thurs 10:45 am-12:00  
pm



## To boldly go...

This course explores major concepts in religion studies through science fiction literature, television, and film. Themes to be covered include (but are not limited to): Utopias/Dystopias, Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, Alternative Worlds, Human and PostHuman Futures, God and Technology. Our investigation of these themes will rely on a wide variety of sources designed to enlighten and illustrate the many different ways both religion and sci-fi deal with questions of meaning, identity, and the nature of reality.

## Learning Objectives

Students in this course will:

- 1) Acquire knowledge about how humans theorize life, the universe, and everything (aka basic "religious literacy")
- 2) Develop core competencies in writing, speaking, and information literacy



## Required texts

The following books are **required**. They can be purchased at University Books and More or wherever fine books are sold. All other required readings will be available on Course Site. There will also be occasional viewings required *on your own* (along with some in-class viewings).

- Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*
- Madeleine L'Engle. *A Wrinkle in Time*.
- Phoebe North, *Starglass*

*We will communicate any changes or additions in class so be sure to always get notes from a friend if you miss a day.*

## Assignments

What follows is a general summary of the assignments for this course. Further details about each task will be available on Course Site and in class.

**Class Attendance and Participation:** We expect you to be present in class and to respectfully engage in class activities and take part in discussions. We realize that not everyone is a social butterfly, but we do expect you to speak up now and then— the emphasis here is on quality, not quantity. **Value: 10% of final grade**

**Essay 1:** A 3-4 page persuasive essay on a topic/text of your choice covered to this point in the class. **Value: 15%. Due date: Tuesday, February 13.**

**Midterm exam:** We will have an in-class midterm exam on **Thursday, March 8. Value: 20% of final grade**

**Essay 2:** For the second essay, you will have a choice of either a traditional persuasive essay *or* a creative format such as an imagined dialogue. **Value: 15%. Due: Thursday, April 5.**



**Major group research project:** Throughout the course of the semester, you will work in groups to prepare a group research presentation and final project. This will be due in stages, including a topic proposal, an outline, and so on. There will be further details in class. Presentations will be in class during the final week of the semester; final papers will be due on **Monday, May 7. Value: 30% of final grade (20% project, 10% presentation)**

**Extra Credit:** The study of religion intersects with a host of other fields in the humanities and social sciences, including the study of race, gender, history, sexuality, modern languages and literatures, sociology, and philosophy, to name just a few possibilities. Throughout the semester, we will be sharing mentions of events, typically sponsored by academic departments and programs in these fields, that can broaden your intellectual horizons while at Lehigh. You can also ask us about events you have learned about on your own. For extra credit, you may attend *up to 2* such events and write them up in a 2 page typed, double-spaced summary and reflection paper. *The final date on which you may turn in such papers is May 3.* The value of extra credit assignments and other details will be discussed in class.

## Policies

**Low-tech life:** Try it. You'll like it. Although we do permit laptops and tablets in class, we will periodically ask you to close your computers and try writing things by hand and going screen free so there are no distractions, so always have paper and a writing implement handy. We are permitting devices because so many of our readings are on Course Site. However, we strongly encourage you to try printing them out and going screen-free. It changes how you think. See, for example, the study discussed in this article: <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>

**Co-teaching and communication:** Co-teaching is a lot of fun and gives you the opportunity to benefit from the insights of two different professors. It can also be logistically complicated. The best way to communicate with us is by checking in before or after class. If e-mailing, please be sure to **send all e-mails to both of your professors. Always indicate your name and what course you are taking in your e-mail! Your Lehigh university e-mail address is an official form of university communication; check it daily.**

**Ch-ch-ch-changes:** The instructors reserve the **right to alter readings, assignments, or the schedule below**

**WE DO NOT ACCEPT LATE PAPERS.** The only exceptions are extraordinary situations (i.e., hospitalizations, serious family emergencies) that are documented through the Dean of Students' office. This is the best way for us to be fair to everyone. Plan your time accordingly, and get started *early*.

**Academic Integrity:** Here is the Lehigh University Undergraduate Student Senate Statement on Academic Integrity: "We, the Lehigh University Student Senate, as the standing representative body of all undergraduates, reaffirm the duty and obligation of students to meet and uphold the highest principles and values of personal, moral and ethical conduct. As partners in our educational community, both students and faculty share the responsibility for promoting and helping to ensure an environment of

academic integrity. As such, each student is expected to complete all academic course work in accordance to the standards set forth by the faculty and in compliance with the University's Code of Conduct.”

**Accommodations for students with disabilities:** If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting accommodations, please contact both your instructor and the Office of Academic Support Services, Williams Hall, Suite 301 (610-758-4152) as early as possible in the semester. You must have documentation from the Academic Support Services office before accommodations can be granted.



### Lehigh University endorses the Principles of Our Equitable Community

[[http://www.lehigh.edu/-inprv/initiatives/PrinciplesEquity\\_Sheet\\_v2\\_032212.pdf](http://www.lehigh.edu/-inprv/initiatives/PrinciplesEquity_Sheet_v2_032212.pdf)]. We

expect each member of this class to acknowledge and practice these principles. Respect for each other and for differing viewpoints is a vital component of the learning environment inside and outside the classroom. At times, we will disagree. This is normal. However, we will not engage in mockery, the use of slurs, or other disrespectful behavior.

## Schedule of Readings

Readings are to be completed *before* the date for which they are assigned; come to class with the readings in hand and key passages that you want to discuss flagged, bookmarked, underlined, or bedazzled. We will have some material prepared for you each day, but the more you enter the class with a sense of what you want to discuss, the more *you* can drive our discussions. Most of the readings for the course are on Course Site in PDF form. When viewings are listed, we indicate whether they will take place in class or you are responsible for locating the film/show in question and watching it *before* class. The exceptions are the three novels listed on page 2 of the syllabus.

Jan 23 Welcome!

Jan 25 Isaac Asimov, “The Last Question”

### Unit 1: What is a human?

Jan 30 *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Season 2, Episode 9, “Measure of a Man.” (*in-class viewing*)

Feb 1 Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 1-103

Feb 6 Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 104-224

## Unit 2: Utopia/Dystopia (Eschatology)

Feb 8 William G. Doty, "Imagining the Future-Possible"

Feb 13 *Star Trek* (The Original Series), Season 3, Episode 20, "The Way to Eden" (in class viewing)

Feb 15 *The Hunger Games* (watch the full first movie *before* class)

Susan Shau Min Tang, "Burn with Us: Sacrificing Childhood in *The Hunger Games*."

Jodi Eichler-Levine, "Fight to the Death and Go 'Hungry' At *Hunger Games* Camp." <http://religiondispatches.org/fight-to-the-death-and-go-hungry-at-emhunger-gamesem-camp/>

Feb 20 Jay McDaniel, "Ecotheology and World Religions," from *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*

## Unit 3: Illusion, Simulacra, and Reality

Feb 22 *The Animatrix* (screen in class)

Adam Gopnik, "The Unreal Thing"

Feb 27 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (excerpts)

Mar 1 *West World* (in-class viewing).

Jay Michaelson, "The Dharma of *West World*."

Mar 6 *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Season 5, Episode 25, "The Inner Light"

Mar 8 MIDTERM EXAM IN CLASS

March 10-18: SPRING BREAK: Go see the film of *A Wrinkle In Time*, which opens March 9, over break.

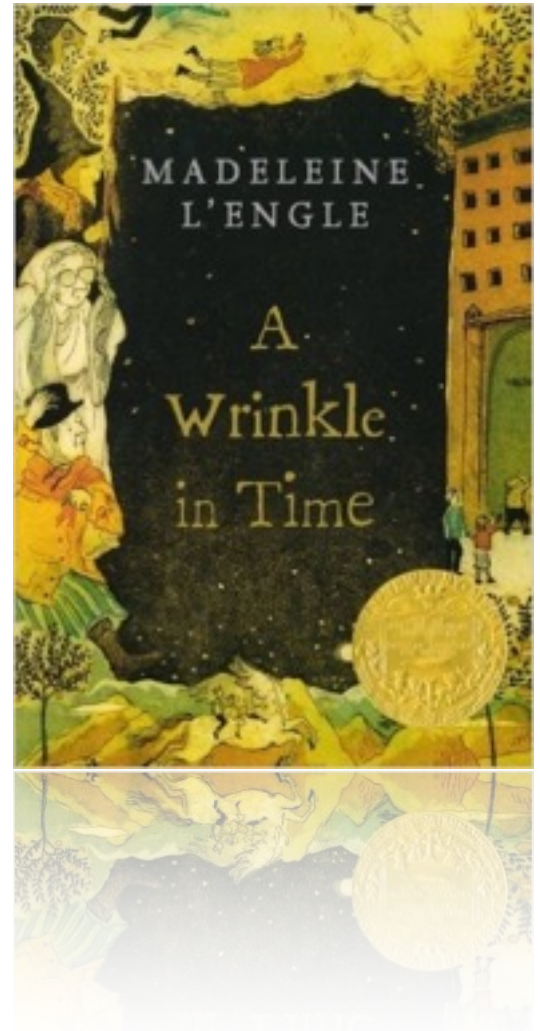
## Unit 4: Alternative Worlds and Big Travel

March 20 *A Wrinkle in Time* (full book)

March 22 Excerpt, Mary-Jane Rubenstein, *Worlds Without End*

March 27 Phoebe North, *Starglass*, 1-201

March 29 Phoebe North, *Starglass*, 202-441





### Unit 5: Immortality and Afterlives

April 3 Black Mirror, Season 3  
Episode 4, “San Junipero” (screen  
in class)

April 5 Leigh Turner,  
“Biotechnology as Religion”

Richard A. Jones, “The Technology  
of Immortality, the Soul, and  
Human Identity”

William Sims Bainbridge,  
“Cyberimmortality: Science,  
Religion, and the Battle to Save  
Our Souls.”

### Unit 6: Gods, and the Ghost in the Machine

April 10 *Twilight Zone* Season 3, Episode 8, “It’s a Good Life,” viewing in class

April 12 Jeremy Stolow, Introduction, *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in Between*

April 17 Harlan Ellison, “Deathbird”

April 19 Kevin Kelly, “God is in the Machine”

Paul Bloom, “Is God an Accident?”

### Unit 7: Fan Cultures and Religion

April 24 Michael Jindra, “It’s About Faith in Our Future: Star Trek Fandom as Cultural Religion”

*Suggested:* Peter Pels, “Amazing Stories: How Science Fiction Sacralizes the Secular”

April 26 John C. Lyden, “Whose Film Is It, Anyway? Canonicity and Authority in *Star Wars* Fandom.”

*Suggested:* Katherine Hellekson, “Fandom and Fan Culture”

May 1 **In class presentations**

May 3 **In class presentations**