Kalamazoo College
Imagining Possible Worlds: Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Philosophy
First-Year Seminar (SEMN-188): Fall 2018

Instructor: Lars Enden, Ph.D.          Email: lenden@kzoo.edu
Meeting Location: Olds Upton 321A      Office Location: Humphrey House 202
Meeting Time: MWF 11:55 a.m.–1:10 p.m. Office Hours: MW 1:20–2:20 p.m. (or by appt.)

Course Description
Which story is more likely to occur in the real world: Star Wars or The Lord of the Rings? According to Scottish philosopher David Hume, “nothing we [can] imagine is absolutely impossible.” So, since science fiction and fantasy stories seem equally imaginable, maybe they are equally possible. However, the great sci-fi writer Isaac Asimov once said, “science fiction, given its grounding in science, is possible; fantasy, which has no grounding in reality, is not.” So, maybe fantasy stories are not possible after all. This suggests a deeper, underlying philosophical question: “what does it even mean to say that something is possible?” In this course, therefore, we will explore the question “what is possible?” using science fiction and fantasy stories as our guide. To do this, we will read such notable contemporary writers as Margaret Atwood, Stephen King, Michael Chabon, Ursula K. Le Guin, T. C. Boyle, and Octavia E. Butler. We will also watch three very weird movies and even a few episodes of Star Trek. We will use these experiences as the foundation for our philosophical study of possibility, which will include thinking hard about such topics as God, evil, freedom, knowledge, and zombies. YES!—that’s right—ZOMBIES!!

Required Texts

Required Media
Graded Work
Papers: 10% each x 3 = 30%
   One term paper will be written in three parts throughout the term.
Reading/Film Questions: 1% each x 20 = 20%
   Whenever reading or a film viewing is due, there are reading/film questions. These are available on Moodle, and they must be typed, printed, and delivered in person during class. The schedule at the end of this syllabus lists due dates.
Participation: 15%
   Participation is mandatory. Each day 2 points are available for participation. 1 point is for attendance—arrive on time and stay until the end; and the other point is for engagement—be actively involved in all classroom activities.
Annotated Bibliography and Presentation: 15%
   At the end of the term, an annotated bibliography is due based on research and give a 10-15 minute presentation about that research.
Philosophical Reflections: 10%
   At the end of every class, we will take a few minutes to write down some of our thoughts about the topic of discussion during the class.
Beyond Google Workshop: 10%
   We will participate in a workshop with the research librarians to help use develop our research skills and prepare for the annotated bibliography and presentation.

First-Year Forums: (There is a -2% penalty on your final grade per each missed forum.)
First-Year Forums are intended to help entering K students continue their academic and personal growth. They are interactive, intentionally developmental, focused on learning, and built on aspects of the K-Plan. The Forums fall into five groups:
   • Group 1: Social Justice and Civic Engagement
   • Group 2: Intercultural Understanding
   • Group 3: Personal Decision-Making and Habits
   • Group 4: Career and Professional Development
   • Group 5: Independent Scholarship and Academic Success
All first-year students are required to attend one Forum in each group, but many students decide to attend more.

Academic Honesty:
This course operates under the College Honor System. That means: we treat each other with respect, we nurture independent thought, we take responsibility for personal behavior, and we accept environmental responsibility. Academic honesty is a critical part of our value system at K. When you borrow an idea, express the idea in your own words, thus thinking it through and making it your own, and acknowledge the source of the idea in a note, or, in certain situations, use the exact words of the source in quotation marks and acknowledge with a note. Ideas raised in class are part of the public domain and, therefore, sources of the ideas need not be acknowledged. If you are ever in doubt about this, you must ask. For the full policy, see https://reason.kzoo.edu/studev/policies/dishonest/
Writing Competencies:
The First-Year Seminar faculty has established the following goals for fostering writing competencies that will help prepare students for writing in discipline-specific courses in the major and, eventually, for writing the SIP. We hope that every first-year student will develop greater competency in these areas:

Achieving clarity through revision
- stating and developing a thesis
- writing coherent sentences and well-developed paragraphs
- using correct grammar and mechanics
- being conscious of overall structure and impact
- becoming proficient at editing and proof reading
- writing frequently to gain fluency
- expressing ideas directly and economically

Constructing an argument using evidence
- understanding the difference between opinion, argument, and evidence, and becoming aware of which of the three serves the writing project at hand
- synthesizing others' ideas with one's own
- using sources to support ideas and positions
- using quoted materials effectively and correctly

Gaining experience in research strategies
- understanding why doing research is important
- learning how to do research, beginning with the earliest stages
- putting newly gained knowledge and skills into practice
- working as independent scholars and contributing to scholarly discourse throughout college and beyond

Cultivating an authentic and versatile style of written communication
- discovering one's own way into material
- making deliberate choices about structure, style, and voice, with a distinct awareness of audience, context and impact
- writing in a natural, straightforward style
- demonstrating or developing authenticity and ownership of the work

The Learning Commons:
The Learning Commons is a network of peer support available to help you with a variety of skills and disciplines. The Writing Center, Biology and Chemistry Center, Research Consultant Center, and Center for New Media Design are on the first floor of Upjohn Library. The English as a Second Language support program is located there as well. The Math-Physics Center is in Olds Upton Hall. Students who frequent these centers generally learn more and receive higher grades, so I encourage you to use them early and often. You can find more information about each of these centers here: https://reason.kzoo.edu/learningcommons/

Monday Movie Nights:
Film Questions are always due on Wednesdays. I will arrange for film viewing on the previous Monday at 7 p.m. before film questions are due. If you cannot make it to the viewing, you will have to make other arrangements to view the films.
Disability Accommodations:
If you have disability that requires accommodation, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together with the college to develop appropriate accommodations. Please see https://www.kzoo.edu/student-life/students-with-disabilities/

Classroom Policies:

1. **No Electronic Devices**

   All laptops, cell phones, etc. must be silenced and stored away before class begins. A cell phone in your lap is not properly stored. If I see you using any electronic device at any time during class, you will automatically lose your engagement point for the day.

2. **Late Work and Office Hours**

   In general, work can only be turned in during class time. However, you may turn in reading questions from a missed class AND do the philosophical reflections if both of the following are true: (a) you contact me before class begins that you will miss the class, and (b) you meet with me in office hours no more than a week after the missed class.

3. **Be Respectful and Courteous**

   We will be discussing many philosophical issues in this class; you may have strong opinions about them, and some of your peers may not agree with you. It is important that everyone feels that they are welcome to contribute to the conversation. In philosophy, we criticize ideas; we do not criticize people. Any student who acts in a disrespectful manner will simply be asked to leave.

General Advice

Take your education seriously. You will probably only get one chance at college; don’t waste it. Do your assigned reading; take good notes; participate in the learning environment; be punctual; and turn in your work on time.

Some of the reading is difficult. Please do not give up on the reading just because you don’t understand it right away. Just keep reading even if you are not sure you understand it. You probably understand more than you think, and you will get better at reading difficult texts the more you practice it. Think of it as developing a skill.

Contribute to the discussion. This course is a seminar, which is a classroom style that may not be familiar to you. It is very different from a traditional lecture-style classroom. A seminar is about exploring ideas rather than about learning facts. Therefore, it is part of your responsibility to contribute to the discussion as much as you can. You are expected to be a part of the conversation.
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<td>S 129-145</td>
<td>Film Cloud Atlas November 7</td>
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*Movie Monday Nights


The final paper is due in my office by Monday, November 19th at 12:00 p.m.