

PHILOSOPHY
&
FANTASY
PHILOSOPHY 125
SPRING 2019



Still from *Sorry to Bother You* (2018)

Meeting Time and Location

MWF 1:20–2:30 p.m.
Old Main 315

Professor: Dr. Brandon Polite

Office: Old Main 304
Phone extension: 7240
email: bpolite@knox.edu

Office Hours TuTh 1:00–2:30 p.m.,
& by appointment

Course Description and Objectives

This course considers the nature of human identity.

In particular, we will examine the role that **time** plays in shaping who we are. We will specifically address the natures of **time**, **time travel**, **personal identity**, **racial identity**, and **racism**. We will approach these issues through a careful examination of texts and arguments, primarily by contemporary philosophers, as well as through a number of sci-fi/fantasy films.

By the end of the term, you should be able to...

- **Articulate** some of the leading philosophical theories on time and personal identity.
- **Analyze** sci-fi/fantasy films through one or more philosophical lens.
- **Defend** your own view on a significant philosophical issue.

course details

Website: Accessible via <https://classroom.google.com>

Designation: Satisfies the HUM foundations or IC element requirement.

Readings: All readings are available as PDF's. I expect you to bring them with you to class, either electronically or printed out.

Classroom Courtesy: Cell phones should be turned off for the duration of the class. Because of their tendency to distract other students, I would also prefer that you take notes by hand rather than with a laptop or tablet. I will ban such devices if they become a distraction.

accommodations

If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see me and Stephanie Grimes (sgrimes@knox.edu) in the Office of Disability Support Services, so that such accommodations may be arranged.

Course Requirements

Attendance & Participation (20%) You are required to read the assigned material carefully and to attend class and participate regularly. This comprises an important part of your grade. Comments and questions should be voiced as they arise during our discussions.

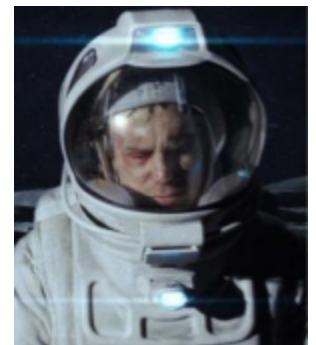
Short Papers (50%) You will write five short papers of roughly 500–600 words (worth 10% each) in response to each of our films. You will analyze the films using our readings with the goal deepening your reader's understanding of our course's core issues. Working on these papers will both help you prepare for our discussions of the films and enable you to think through some ideas in anticipation of your final project.

Final Project (30%) At the end of the term, you will undertake a project that engages with one of our topics. It may be a brief philosophy paper of 1200–1500 words that defends an original argument. Or, it may be more of a creative work that represents one of the philosophical puzzles we have dealt with this term and perhaps a proposed solution: e.g. short story, screenplay, comic book, film, collection of songs, and the like. Whatever you end up doing will go through a proposal process and will be approved by me.

For a more thorough explanation of what I will expect from you in this class, click [here](#).



J. M. E. McTaggart (1866–1925) was a British idealist philosopher who wrote mostly on metaphysics (or the study of being). We will read his most famous work, in which he argues that our experience of time is an illusion—a mere mental construct.



late assignments

{adapted from [Katia Vavova](#)}

Three principles guide my late policy:

1. Work should be assessed on its quality and whether it demonstrates learning.
2. Each assignment has a purpose; that purpose can only be fulfilled within a certain time frame.
3. Deadlines allow us to organize our time and learning and to meet our goals.

In light of these, **late papers will only be accepted up until the moment I return them to those who submitted them on time. After that, they will not be accepted for credit.** (This moment won't be announced in advance, and it will vary, but it will typically be within a week.) Further, barring extraordinary circumstances, I will not grant extensions. Instead, all late papers submitted before I return the others will be docked by one full letter grade. You'll still want to get papers in close to the original deadline, because otherwise I cannot guarantee you comments. This is not about punishing you for getting in late work. It's about enabling me to schedule my time.

Getting your assignments in on time allows us to stay together as a class—to discuss assignments after everyone has finished and well before the next assignment is due (so you have time to reflect and improve). We all have so many demands on our time, and we need to be able to plan ahead. If people complete assignments late, they fall behind, cannot contribute to class discussions, and can hold us back during assignment based in class activities. Worse yet, they hurt their own learning.

Grades

Attendance and Participation	20%
Short Papers (5)	50%
Final Project	30%

grading scale

A+	100 – 97.7	C+	79.9 – 77.7	F	59 – 0
A	97.6 – 93	C	77.6 – 73.4		
A-	93.3 – 90	C-	73.3 – 70		
B+	89.9 – 87.7	D+	69.9 – 67.7		
B	87.6 – 83.4	D	67.6 – 63.4		
B-	83.3 – 80	D-	63.3 – 60		

Syllabus

1. Time and Time Travel

3/22 F J. M. E. McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time"

3/25 M Kristie Miller, "Presentism, Eternalism, and the Growing Block," pp. 345–51

3/27 W Kristie Miller, "Presentism, Eternalism, and the Growing Block," pp. 351–61

3/29 F Kristie Miller, "Morality in the Branching Universe"

4/1 M David Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel"

Screening: Terry Gilliam, *12 Monkeys* (1995)

4/3 W Discuss *12 Monkeys*—**Short Paper 1 due 4/4 by 3pm**

4/5 F Peter van Inwagen, "Changing the Past," pp. 3–15

4/8 M Peter van Inwagen, "Changing the Past," pp. 15–28

Screening: Harold Ramis, *Groundhog Day* (1993)

4/10 W Discuss *Groundhog Day*—**Short Paper 2 due 4/11 by 3pm**

2. Personal Identity

4/12 F Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity," pp. 2–18

4/15 M Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity," pp. 18–27

4/17 W J. David Velleman, "So It Goes"

4/19 F J. David Velleman, "So It Goes," continued

4/22 M Marya Schechtman, "Personhood and Personal Identity"

Screening: Michel Gondry, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004)

... Continued on Next Page ...

written work

You will submit all of your papers on Google Classroom. For each assignment, a new Google Doc will be created for you. You can choose to type directly into it or copy and paste your work from another word processor.

Readings

All readings are in PDF form and can be accessed by clicking the links embedded in the M's, W's, and F's to the left of each on the syllabus. You can also access them via Google Drive in the shared "Philosophy and Fantasy 2019 Readings" folder: <https://drive.google.com>.

Note. You can only access the readings if you are logged in to your Knox email account, which you can access via <https://my.knox.edu>.

Honor Code

This course, as any other at Knox, operates within the parameters set by the Honor Code. Please note, in the everyday business of this course, students are encouraged to talk through all course material with one another and to function as interlocutors for one another. This extends to preparing to write your papers. However, each student is required to write their own work, to cite all sources fully, and to give explicit credit where particular formulations of claims, arguments, and examples are the product of cooperative work.

Writing tutors are available in the CTL, often on a walk-in (first come, first served) basis, Monday through Friday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., as well as in the Red Room of Seymour Library, Tuesday through Thursday, from 7 to 9 p.m.

4/24	W	Discuss <i>Eternal Sunshine</i> —Short Paper 3 due 4/25 by 3pm
4/26	F	Daniel C. Dennett, "Where Am I?"
4/29	M	Rebecca Roache, "Fission, Cohabitation and the Concern for Future Survival"
Screening: Duncan Jones, <i>Moon</i> (2009)		
5/1	W	Discuss <i>Moon</i> —Short Paper 4 due 5/2 by 3pm
3. Racial Identity and Racism		
5/3	F	Charles W. Mills, "But What Are You <i>Really?</i> " pp. 41–54
5/6	M	Rebecca Tuvel, "In Defense of Transracialism"
5/8	W	Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Racisms"
5/10	F	Linda Martín Alcoff, "Racism and Visible Race"
5/13	M	Frantz Fanon, "The Fact of Blackness"
Screening: Boots Riley, <i>Sorry to Bother You</i> (2018)		
5/15	W	Discuss <i>Sorry to Bother You</i> —Short Paper 5 due 5/16 by 3pm
4. Final Project		
5/17	F	Final Project Discussion
5/20	M	Project Meetings (No Class)
5/22	W	Project Meetings (No Class)
TBD	?	Final Project due

Participation

Daily participation will be graded on the following scale:

- 4 You arrive on time and participate voluntarily in class. You ask questions of the professor and other students that are relevant to the topic being discussed or provide thoughtful, detailed comments on the readings, ideas, and issues raised in discussion.
- 3 You arrive on time and participate voluntarily in class, asking questions or offering comments that are relevant to the issues raised in discussion.
- 2 You might be late for class. Or you are on time, but your comments or questions may be irrelevant to the topic discussed. Or, although you might not voluntarily offer information, you nonetheless seem to be engaged with the discussion.
- 1 You might be very late to class. Or you seem disengaged or make irrelevant or distracting comments that do not enrich the discussion.
- 0 You are absent or fall asleep.

Note. Monopolizing the discussion is not quality participation.

Attendance Policy

Philosophy is essentially a conversation that has been ongoing for over than two millennia. To succeed in this or any philosophy class, one must be engaged with and a contributor to the conversation. At a bare minimum, this requires showing up to class. Thus, **I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. If you miss more than 3 classes, I will drop your final grade by 1/3 of a letter for each additional day you miss** (an A- becomes a B+, etc.). Of course, extenuating circumstances (serious illness, death in the family) arise. If this is the case, please be in touch so that we can work to determine how you can still participate and succeed in the course.



Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), born in the French colony of Martinique, was a psychologist, philosopher, and revolutionary whose work dealt with the issues of race, racism, colonization, and anti-colonial resistance. In his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon psychoanalyzes the Black person in White majority countries as one who has come to adopt the identity their White oppressor's have constructed for them. We will consider one part of this analysis.

advice

If you often find it difficult to speak up in class, I have written a [document](#) in which I offer suggestions in response to the main reasons students have given me for their difficulties.



12 Monkeys

dir. Terry Gilliam, 1995
 Starring: Bruce Willis, Brad Pitt, Madeleine Stowe

Screening: 4/1, OM 315 @ 7 p.m.



Groundhog Day

dir. Harold Ramis, 1993
 Starring: Bill Murray, Andie MacDowell, Chris Elliott

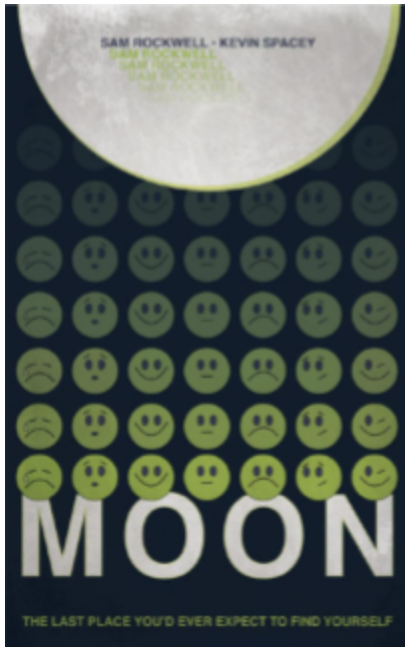
Screening: 4/8, OM 315 @ 7 p.m.



Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

dir. Michel Gondry, 2004
 Starring: Jim Carrey, Kate Winslet, Kirsten Dunst, Mark Ruffalo

Screening: 4/22, OM 301 @ 7 p.m.



Moon

dir. Duncan Jones, 2009
 Starring: Sam Rockwell

Screening: 4/29, Wilson House @ 7 p.m.

Notice

Attending film screenings is **MANDATORY**. If you cannot make a screening, please let me know as far in advance as possible.

Failure to attend a screening (without a valid and verifiable excuse) will result in a **10% reduction** of your participation grade.

DVD's or Blu-ray's of the films will be available on reserve in the library.



Sorry to Bother You

dir. Boots Riley, 2018
 Starring: LaKeith Stanfield, Tessa Thompson, Jermaine Fowler

Screening: 5/13, Wilson House @ 7 p.m.